

**FROM RAGS TO RICHES: CREATING YOUR OWN DESTINY –  
A JOURNEY INTO THE UNKNOWN**

**by**

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## STATEMENT OF DECLARATION BY CANDIDATE

‘I declare that *From Rags to Riches: Creating Your Own Destiny – A Journey into the Unknown* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.’

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D.P. Knobel

## SUMMARY

The aim of the current study is to provide detailed information regarding individuals' turning-point experiences, in order to understand the psychological and spiritual aspects involved in moving beyond a significant low point towards a significant high point in one's life. It seems that inadequate information regarding formal studies about this phenomenon exists in literature, which this study endeavours to address. Thereby, a qualitative phenomenological study was conducted amongst nineteen South African citizens, who were purposefully and conveniently selected from the diverse population of South Africa. Individual participants confirmed that they had experienced significant low points from which they had been able to move to reach a significant high point. Through interviews, River-of-life (RoL) drawings and a short background information questionnaire (SBIQ), participants were able to provide information on their experiences. The participants' stories, obtained during the interviews, were transcribed, and then triangulated with information obtained from the RoL drawings, completed SBIQ's, researcher notes and other additional sources, during the analysis phase. Thematic analysis was performed on individuals' stories to obtain the research participants' themes, which provided the aspects involved in their turning-point experiences. In-depth analysis of all participants' stories produced a theme-model consisting of main and unique themes. Unique themes identified by the study supported the main themes. Themes highlighted through the study included minding oneself, support from and to, doing something, religion/faith in God, positive attitude and meaning. The positive psychology theoretical framework was applied in interpreting the findings. This study suggests that a combination of themes is relevant in one's ability to move beyond a low point experience towards a high point experience. The application of the theme-model could assist others in similar situations to create change or a turning-point experience in order to move away from or transcend a low point. The study was linked to the subjective measuring of Quality of Life (QOL). It is recommended that more subjective indicators of QOL, including spirituality indicators, be investigated. While this study focussed on the internal influences affecting change in a person's life towards fulfilment, further studies may investigate the external influences.

**Key words:** creating, destiny, turning-point experiences, phenomenology, positive psychology, meaning, positive attitude, religion, faith in a Creator, spirituality, quality of life (QOL)

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background: God, creation and creating

Since ancient times, people were fascinated with the creation either, from a monotheistic point of view, a divine Creator, or from a polytheistic point of view, deities that did or did not create the natural world or creation. Deities, according to Dictionary.com (Deity, 2017) refers to a god/God or goddess, which includes the concept of divinity or having “divine character or nature, especially that of the Supreme Being” (p. 1). According to three major religions, namely Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, one divine Creator created the world (Kiger, 2017). Older religions, such as Zoroastrianism and ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian religions, as well as more recent religions, such as Sikhism and Bahá’í, also include the concept of a Divine Being or Creator responsible for the creation (BBC, 2009a; BBC, 2009d; BBC, 2009f; Gascoigne, 2001a; Gascoigne, 2001c). Other religions, such as Hinduism, recognize more than one deity, which may include the concept of a Creator Being, while Buddhism, Shinto and Taoism do not focus on a Creator deity (BBC, 2009b; BBC, 2009e; BBC, 2009g; Kiger, 2017).

From a religious point of view of a Divine Creator, human beings are seen as part of the creation being created by God. Therefore, the expression ‘human being’, as created beings, is often observed in terms of the distinctive nature of being human. Humans are seen as separate from animals by, among other things, religion or being religious, spirituality, finding or aspiring to meaning in life, philosophy, culture, science and technology (Armstrong, 1993; Human being, 2009; Shermer, 2010).

A strong case is made for viewing human beings in terms of the expression *Homo religiosus*, a philosophical term referring to the inherent or natural tendency or inclination of humans to be religious (DuBose, 2014; Shermer, 2010; Sztajer, 2013). According to the Oxford University Press’s World Christian Encyclopaedia (cited in Shermer, 2010, p. 1) “84 percent of the world’s population belongs to some form of organized religion” which makes being religious a common and universal human phenomenon. Another major separation criterion involves the transcendence quality that human beings have (DuBose, 2014).

Armstrong (1993), in relation to humans being spiritual, states in her book, *A History of God: The 4,000-year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*:

Yet my study of the history of religion has revealed that human beings are spiritual animals. Indeed, there is a case for arguing that Homo sapiens is also Homo religious ... Throughout history, men and women have experienced a dimension of the spirit that seems to transcend the mundane world. Indeed, it is an arresting characteristic of the human mind to be able to conceive concepts that go beyond it in this way. However we choose to interpret it, this human experience of transcendence has been a fact of life ... Atheism has often been a transitional state: thus Jews, Christians and Muslims were all called 'atheists' by their pagan contemporaries because they had adopted a revolutionary notion of divinity and transcendence. (pp. 9-10)

As part of the theology and doctrine of three of the main monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – more specifically Sufi Islam), human beings were also distinctively created in the image or likeness of God (Judaism and Christianity), or with attributes similar to Him (Islam) (Armstrong, 1993; Brown, 2017; Islamicteaching.info, 2012). According to Armstrong (1993), the exact meaning of the expression **likeness of God** still remains unclear. However, she highlights that both the Divine God, as seen from the monotheistic point of view, as well as those created by Him (i.e. human beings) have transcendence qualities, although God's transcendence quality unreservedly surpasses those of humans.

From the creationist viewpoint, the world, or creation, came to being as a result of a creation act by God (BBC, 2009c). From the creationist perspective, it is generally believed that “organisms created by God can't produce new forms of organism — only God can do this” (BBC, 2009c, p. 1). Fairly recently in history, with the emerging of science, the creationist approach has been challenged by the evolutionist approach. According to science, the creation, or now called **universe**, was a result of a “**Big Bang**” from which everything else emerged (Howell, 2017). The creationism versus evolutionism debate, where evolutionism represents science, has been ongoing since the theory of evolution was introduced to the world by Darwin (Pappas, 2014).

In general, science does not support the creationist viewpoint as the science community upholds that evidence is lacking. Those supporting the evolutionist viewpoint criticise the creationists for not having sufficient proof to disprove evolution, for which, according to them there are overwhelming evidence (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2008). According to All About Science (2017) evolution is “the belief that all living things, including man,



resulted by natural changes from lifeless matter, with no supernatural intervention involved” (p. 1). Nevertheless, mention of God as an existing Being can be found in various sources of knowledge expressed either through sacred religious texts or scriptures, religious beliefs and practices, experiences of faith, philosophy and/or spirituality. Typing ‘proof among people on the internet that God is an existing Being’, supports this statement. Just typing ‘God’ into Google will render more than 1.8 billion results. It is a fact that the concept of **God** does exist for many people on earth. In addition, the Pope, the leader of the Christian Catholic Church, has claimed that “the scientific account of the beginning of the universe confirms God’s existence” (BBC, 2014, p. 1). According to the Religious News Service (cited in BBC, 2014), he also said “God created human beings and let them develop according to the internal laws that he gave to each one so they would reach their fulfilment” (p. 1).

Another intriguing question about people that has been around for centuries is the question of whether human beings have the ability to determine their own future or destiny. In other words, to be the “master of my [one’s] fate ... the captain of my [one’s] soul” (Henley, 1891, p. 57); or having the ability to ‘create one’s own future or destiny’, or to state it in mythical terms, ‘make the future happen’. In retrospect, throughout the ages, the human race has demonstrated its ability to **create** – through formation and building of civilisations and cultures, expressions of art, advancements in technology, discovering of and travelling to new frontiers, controlling of nature’s challenges, overcoming of disasters and in many more ways (Gascoigne, 2001b). The following question may then be asked, “Do humans, as individuals, have the ability to create, not independently of the Divine Creator God, but by means of a given or ‘created’ ability, presenting itself through individual experiences, enabling them to move themselves from a negative experience/situation in the present towards achieving a positive experience/situation in the future?” Therefore, do humans experience the creating ability by being transcended above and beyond significant negative life experiences?

This thesis will be approached from the creationist viewpoint: The world or creation was created by a Creator (God) and included in the created creation are human beings. The creationist viewpoint was chosen as psychology, since premodern times as well as modernism and postmodernism times (and especially the existential-phenomenological approach), has strong roots in philosophy, which addressed issues concerning God, creation, religion, human life, behaviour and meaning (Kruger, 1987; 1988; Train et al., 2009; Viljoen, 1988). Furthermore, the context within which human experience globally as well as locally (in terms of the study’s participants) takes place, is predominantly religious in comparison to being non-religious as previously indicated by Shermer

(2010) and highlighted by a South African survey (Statistics South Africa, 2014). Although this study was scientifically conducted, the researcher's approach entailed viewing the phenomenon from a 'warm' humanistic/creationist point of view rather than a 'cold' evolutionist point of view. The philosophical question that emerges then, especially from a Biblical perspective, wherein it is written that God created human beings in His image, is, "Do human beings have the ability to create their own destiny?"

## 1.2 Destiny and creating destiny

Destiny and fate are two concepts that have roots in earlier known literature and probably originated within mythology (Fate, 2016b; Fate, 2017). These two concepts can be used to describe the idea of that which people would call upon to come to pass in their future. These two words are generally used interchangeably but could be understood as conceptually different. Although both concepts refer to the predetermined course of events, destiny is something you could do something about, while fate is set and has a finality to it (Fate, 2016b).

According to the Merriam Webster online dictionary (Fate, 2016a) **fate** means, "the will or principle or determining cause by which things in general are believed to come to be as they are or events to happen as they do ... an inevitable and often adverse outcome, condition, or end" (p. 1). According to the New World Encyclopedia (Fate, 2016b) fate is also seen "as a power or agency that inexorably predetermines and orders the course of events ... an outcome totally determined by an outside agency ... [and] defines events as ordered to be" (p. 2).

The general understanding of the concept of **destiny** is that it is "the future destined for a person or thing; fate; fortune; lot ... the predetermined or inevitable course of events .... the ultimate power or agency that predetermines the course of events (Destiny, 2017, p. 3). The concept destiny could thus be seen as "a plan or potential that can be fulfilled or missed depending on the individual's response... [while] the outcome prepared by that destiny is not seen as certain" (Fate, 2016b, p. 2). With destiny "the individual involved is participating in achieving the outcome" (p. 2).

The two concepts could therefore be distinguished in as far as fate, which is unavoidable, leaving a person with no choice in the matter, compared to destiny, where a person has a choice and can willingly participate in its outcome being directly related to the person. It is interesting to note that destiny entails a sense of choice, will, determination and faith, while fate solely relies on that which is out of one's control.

Consequently, for this study, the concept destiny is used in the title to explore the suggested possibility that one has a choice in one's own future outcome; although one's future is, at least from a certain perspective by some, inevitably pre-destined to happen, and in a sense, as the concept fate suggests, determined by some form of external force of power, such as a Divine deity. The researcher wanted to investigate that uniquely human part of experiences over which people could have control and which they could steer into the direction they would willingly want. To create one's own destiny would then mean: The future outcome and experiences people would willingly and by choice like to have, can be created or brought into existence in their own lives through their own participation.

This **creating potential** would especially be searched for within the context of the human being's experience of transitioning from a very real negative or unwanted experience, or low point in life, to a very real positive or desired experience, or high point in life. The identification and description of the characteristics of the phenomena employed during this transition will serve as important aspects to be obtained from people for whom the creation of a significant improvement and change in their quality of life (QOL) is required and desired, to allow them to have positive experiences in spite of the negative experiences they might have had before.

### 1.3 Research rationale

The research rationale of a study presents the main reasons why a study is conducted (Van der Riet & Durrheim, 2006). The rationale of the current study was theoretical in as far as the current researcher wanted to explore and contribute to basic research knowledge regarding extraordinary success stories. The researcher diligently searched the internet (e.g. Google) and various information resources databases (e.g. EBSCOhost, ProQuest, PsychInfo, Unisa Library E-resources) and found that to date not many formal scientific studies were conducted on what he would call rags to riches stories. **Rags to riches** is a classic term that stemmed from literature, specifically the writings of Horatio Alger, who wrote various novels containing rags to riches stories, starting with the story of *Ragged Dick* in 1868, the story is about a young orphan boy who became financially successful through dedication, hard work, education, good character and some luck (McGlinn, 2004). Since then the rags to riches theme has become popular, especially if one considers the amount of books and stories about this topic available on the internet today (Goodreads.com, 2017; Pegg, 2014).

Various studies and reports on success and/or moving from a low income position to a high income position have been conducted, for example studies on successful students and entrepreneurs

(Concordia University, 2011), reports on income mobility in the United States (Hertz, 2006), and moving from rags to riches and riches to rags again in Zimbabwe (Nyathi, Khupe, & Ruparanganda, 2016). In the media there are also many accounts of famous rags to riches stories (Goldschein & Eisenberg, 2011; Greenberg, 2017; Pegg, 2014). Studies to address extreme poverty in the world also exist (World Bank, 2016). As a human science researcher, the current researcher therefore was intrigued by the rags to riches phenomenon and wanted to know more about the aspects involved when a person moves from a rags to a riches situation. He would therefore set out to construct a study to be able to determine how a person was able to move from a significant low point in life to a significant high point.

According to Rossman and Rallis (2012) qualitative research “begins with questions” and the end product is knowledge (p. 3). One of the main purposes in application of the current study’s findings was to be able to contribute significantly to the expansion, building or development of a theory regarding the specific phenomenon under investigation. The current study would therefore aim, in light of existing literature, to become part of “a broader context of academic enquiry” (Van der Riet & Durrheim, 2006, p. 84). Descriptive interpretivism means the subjective experience of the individual is sought and required to be presented through rich description (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). In his endeavour to build theory, the current researcher used rich description of information about participants’ experiences in his attempts to understand their direct lived experiences. This study offers a contribution towards formal research studies in psychology regarding the phenomenon of rags to riches or success stories in describing a person’s experience to move beyond a low point towards a high point, indicating the turning-point experience.

#### **1.4 Rags to riches**

Although the well-known adage “from rags to riches” has a very literal meaning, referring to someone who moved from poverty or obscurity to wealth or fame, for the purpose of this study the researcher would like to use it in a more figurative way and apply it to people who succeeded in moving from a low point in their lives to a high point and the journey it entailed to get from the low to the high. In general terms, rags to riches may refer to any situation in which a person moves beyond poverty towards wealth, and as mentioned, from obscurity to fame which may sometimes be suddenly. In a figurative sense, for this study, it would entail any low impoverished situation from which a person through various means were able to attain an enriched higher state in life. Most people have at least once in their lives felt significantly ‘down’ or ‘low’ for an unspecified period and have experienced, what would be referred to in this study as a state or position of ‘rags’.

In phenomenological psychology terms (i.e. including life experience and emotions) this position or state would in general imply to mean having experienced feelings of extreme sadness, being noticeably disheartened, feeling very lonely, being depressed or hopeless, tremendously disappointed or discouraged in life, but also being destitute, bankrupt, impoverished, suffering and needy, having much less than others, or even being physically awfully poor, broke or penniless. In positive psychological terms, rags could be equated to “a state in which an individual is devoid of positive emotion toward life, is not functioning well psychologically or socially, and has not been depressed during the last year” (Keyes & Haidt, 2003, p. 294). In terms of QOL, rags could be an indication of a state of poverty, lack of health, being unemployed and uneducated, lack of material living conditions and leisure/social interactions, feeling unsafe, being deprived of basic rights and lacking overall life satisfaction (Eurostat Statistics Explained, 2013a; 2013b).

In contrast then, wouldn't many people who have experienced such a state of lowness, after the passing of time, have been able to say, they have experienced a significant 'high' or higher state, referred to as a state or position of 'riches', following their previous experience? Or perhaps even more so, would anyone be able to say, “I had the new improved or higher experience as a result of the former lower experience”? Stated differently, would any person be able to say, “I have experienced a situation or state of 'rags'” or “I am experiencing a situation of rags”, but, I have experienced or I will be experiencing a situation or state of 'riches' one day”; hence going from rags to riches?

In phenomenological psychology terms, this position or state of riches would in general imply to mean having developed optimally, having meaning in life, experiencing self-fulfilment, being self-transcended and having reached one's peak. In positive psychological terms riches could be equated to Seligman's (2002; 2011b) authentic happiness and eudaimonic well-being, and flourishing or “a state in which an individual feels positive emotion toward life and is functioning well psychologically and socially” (Keyes & Haidt, 2003, p. 294). In terms of QOL, riches could be an indication of a state of being rich, in good health, being employed and educated, having proper material living conditions and abundance relating to leisure/social interaction, feeling safe, having one's basic rights met and being satisfied with one's life in general (Eurostat Statistics Explained, 2013a; 2013b).

Therefore, this state or position of riches, in this study, would in general imply to mean: experiencing feelings of extreme happiness, exaltation, or being very pleased, having a wonderful time, achieving noticeable success, having significant meaning in life, having reached a place of no more suffering, euphoria and/or bliss, being in high spirit or ecstatic; and may also include to mean

the experience of having sufficient wealth, possessions or money, feeling largely privileged, being prosperous, not having worries about insufficient financial resources or having more than enough money. The concepts of rags and riches will become clearer in Chapter 3 when it will be discussed in terms of their theoretical meanings.

### **1.5 Research problem**

According to Yeasmin and Rahman (2012), research is “a systematic investigation to find answers to a problem” (p. 154). A well-formulated research problem, according to Babbie and Mouton (2006) “contains two elements – a clear indication of the purpose of the research, and a clear specification of the object of study (or unit of analysis)” (pp. 78-79). The purpose of the current study is to explore and describe participants’ experiences with regard to moving from a rags, or low point, position to a riches, or high point, position, focussing on the turning-point experience(s) in-between. In exploring and describing this problem of what turning from a low point to a high point entails, the current researcher wanted to determine and understand which psychological and/or spiritual aspects (presented as themes) were present. He further wanted to provide an in-depth description of the turning-point experiences and the aspects involved. This was done by gathering information from each research participant through a River of life (RoL) drawing, interview recording, short background questions questionnaire (SBIQ), and other additional/applicable sources of information (e.g. researcher notes). The unit of analysis was the individual participant’s story about her/his turning-point experience(s), which was mainly contained within the individual’s interview transcript; obtained for analysis.

In order to fulfil the purpose of obtaining in-depth understanding of what a rags to riches story entails, the current researcher asked participants with such stories to tell him about their experiences regarding this phenomenon. The current study’s formal research question was formulated as follows: In your own (any) words, can you please describe your significant – which can mean noteworthy or important – low point in (your) life (along with the significant) high point in (your) life (experienced); and the aspects that you thought, felt, said, did and/or believed that moved you from (or passed) the low to the high point? (See Appendix D). The reason why research participants were asked, “(what) **you** thought, felt, said, did and/or believed” was two-fold. Firstly, it was to get rich detailed information about their own and unique experiences (i.e. to personalise their stories), and secondly, it was to probe them to provide information about their personal involvement in their turning experience (i.e. to indicate what, if any, role they played in this experience).

## **1.6 Storytelling**

Human beings' religious and spiritual interests and beliefs along with knowledge of culture, art, music and moral values were traditionally conveyed from generation-to-generation, amongst other methods, via storytelling (African Traditional Religions, 2006; Sheppard, 2004). Especially traditional religions originally used verbal means to keep each other informed where religious or spiritual matters were concerned. Storytelling was not only used as a means of spiritual and religious enlightenment, but also as a means of educating, for cultural development, as well as for entertainment (Sole & Wilson, 2002). Some of the main advantageous uses of storytelling include socialisation, meaning-making of personal experiences and self-development (Bamberg, 2012; Chaitin, 2003; Kyratzis, 2005; Wang, Koh & Song, 2015). Stories allow people to “connect with others, empathize, and make judgements ... help us position ourselves ... cultivate knowledge and understanding” (Wales & Mohamed, 2013, p. 60). To illustrate the profound effect of stories on human existence, phrases such as history ('his-[s]tory'), life story, and 'story of my life' come to mind.

As individuals, people have day-to-day experiences, and as social beings, they like to share them with each other. By sharing, they can remind themselves and others about past experiences. One way of sharing experiences is by telling **stories**. People like to tell others about their planned experiences for the future, thereby projecting their stories into the future – by foretelling how 'life-to-come' would be. Storytelling is a very strong way of assigning meaning to experiences, or in other words, it is a very powerful way of constructing each individual's experience of the world they live in (Wales & Mohamed, 2013). It is sometimes so powerful that it needs to be written down, made pictures of or written songs about. However, it is important to remember, that the stories are only a secondary representation of the primary experience. In considering the fact that an experience is more than just words, and that words would be unable to capture the totality of the experience, it still remains a valuable and effective means to analyse and provide with insight into human social experiences.

## **1.7 Stories as small narratives understood within context**

In this study, the researcher wanted to find the aspects necessary to create a renewed situation for the research participants within a narrative form of sharing their experiences through telling their stories. Thereby the researcher would search for the answer to the research question within the narrative truth perspective. The participant's narrative truth or “a believable story” (Spence cited in McLeod, 2011) to better understand and provide “a plausible account of some of the possible

reasons” of how they managed to move beyond their circumstances and situations, would then be used (p. 56). According to Bruner (cited in McLeod, 2011), one way of knowing the world is through **narrative knowing**. This type of knowing is “based on a process of making sense of the world by telling stories” (p. 221).

According to Bamberg (2012) the narrator, or teller of the story, can “give narrative form to experience” through the narrative or a story (p. 77). The researcher, therefore, was striving to obtain research participants’ viewpoint on the aspects under investigation from their narrative or **storytelling-knowing** viewpoint. Externalisation is a specific technique used in narrative therapy to help clients name and identify in their own words possible hidden problems and helping them distance themselves from them (McLeod, 2011). What was previously seen as a “deadly serious” problem can then be resolved through re-authoring or opening up the space for “telling new types of stories about the problem” (pp. 237-238).

In following the storytelling approach to obtain an account of their experiences, research participants in this study were provided the opportunity to externalise their low, high and in-between experiences through story form. Their experiences were recorded during an interview and later transcribed to obtain transcripts. Prior to the interviews taking place, a further opportunity was provided by requesting research participants to create their own RoL drawings. It was presumed that research participants would not experience any significant hurt or be caused any harm in telling their stories, especially since their low point experiences were externalised in this way. However, the researcher was sensitive to be aware of any issues, and should any signs present themselves, would stop the research process to avoid situations of participants re-living hurtful experiences.

The researcher had the opportunity to look into the storyteller’s **realm of experience**, namely the meaning she/he assigns to their individual subjective experience of events, and “the **realm of narrative means** (or devices) that are put to use to make (this) sense” (Bamberg, 2012, p. 77). The storyteller is the author of her/his own story and uses language as a device to “structure, store and communicate” experiences (McLeod, 2011, p. 221). The use of language includes, among telling stories, metaphors and ways of talking within a world culture within which we live and are characterised by, for example, “myths, novels, TV soaps, office gossip, family histories” (p. 221).

Qualitative research within the interpretive paradigm primarily takes into account the person’s subjective experience, but to fully understand the **text**, for example “human creations, words, actions and experiences”, one needs to understand it within context (Terre Blanche, Kelly, & Durrheim, 2006, p. 275). Contextual understanding fundamentally implies having empathy with a



person's story. To attain this, it further means to have knowledge about the person's personal, socio-historical and linguistic context within which she/he is telling their story. This study did not endeavour to explore the socio-historical and linguistic contexts in detail, but rather the personal context in terms of the stories told, the pictures drawn and additional information provided, for example through researcher notes and short background questions answered.

### **1.8 The research participants' journeys as stories and drawings**

In following a phenomenological-positive psychology approach, the researcher regards each person's life as a continuous journey, searching for meaning, towards a certain goal or goals. This study focussed on the smaller journeys, or **short stories**, within each person's total life journey. The specific smaller journeys the researcher was interested in, were deemed to have commenced when a person was at any low point of her/his journey and experiencing significant thoughts/feelings of being 'down' or 'in a hole' or 'in the dumps' or just generally being at a considerable significant low point in her/his life. Such a low point was identified and observed to be so by research participants themselves, and regarded as significant through their own perception thereof. They declared and described the smaller journey experiences in their own unique ways and words.

Subsequently, these significant low point small journeys were deemed to have ended when the person reached a significant higher point (again as self-perceived and declared by themselves) and characterised with significant thoughts/feelings of having found meaning, or achieved, accomplished and realised a goal or dream, and being contented, happy, gratified, relieved, released and comforted. High points reached were regarded by the researcher as each research participant's small journey's **destiny** following and sometimes resulting from their previously significant lower point experience. Similar to the low point, a high point was perceived and regarded as significant by participants themselves and declared and described in their own unique ways and words.

Such small journey experiences, within the context of the total life's journey, were further regarded as a destiny reached by the person resulting from or because of certain phenomena that played a significant role during the changeover from a low to a high point. The researcher was interested in determining what these phenomena or aspects would be. In the end, the lived experiences under investigation would be categorised as either psychological or spiritual aspects of the changeover experience. The identifying and describing of these aspects would mean the researcher had to zoom in on the time of the small journey of research participants surrounding the **turning-point** experiences.

The researcher was interested in possibly identifying the exact points where the research participants' low points started changing towards their high points, but if not able to do so, to richly describe the aspects within their unique experiences thereof. Thorough investigation of these aspects would take place to indicate what the intricacies surrounding them would be, as well as the possible effects or outcomes if applied or utilised. Hence, by taking into account the context within and surrounding each story, the individual's success and effectiveness in changing her/his experience for the better, was reflected upon.

The main idea of ascribing a beginning and an end to a research participant's destiny was to allow the researcher a chance to gaze for a brief moment in time into, as well as briefly focus on, a person's small life journey. It would also enable the participants to reflect on a part of their own lives by separating a part of their lives as part of a journey (i.e. "river of life") having former **low** experiences in relation to later **high** experiences, with an experience or moment-in-between where there was a significant change or turning-point. The researcher, through interpretations and conclusions drawn from their stories, would ultimately highlight the significance of the change. In ultimately contributing to their own personal knowledge and/or development, the researcher would provide personal feedback to research participants regarding the study and its findings, interpretations and conclusions pertaining to them individually.

The RoL drawing is a visual expression of each research participant's small life journey within the minimum context of the individual's low point, high point and what happened in-between. They were also requested to draw it within the broad parameters of their total life journey, indicating their birth dates and their projected or expected dates of passing on. The researcher requested this beforehand, having shown his own example to them, but this was not forced on them. The researcher presented them with his own RoL drawing example to show his openness towards all of them and also presented them with the same example to ensure some objectivity when this type of data was collected. The researcher would discover that each participant's drawing was unique and different from the others, as well as from the example. The researcher would, however, investigate how these drawings supported transcribed interview data and provided a contextual understanding thereof.

## **1.9 The unknown**

According to Fearof.net (n.d.) top 100 list, one of humankind's greatest fears is the fear of the unknown or *xenophobia* (27<sup>th</sup> on the list), which means "fearing anything or anyone that is strange or foreign" (p. 1). *Xeno* is the Greek word for "strange, different or foreign" (Xeno, 2016, p. 1).

McLeod (2011) suggests that there is a movement away from mainstream psychological approaches where reality is regarded from a so-called common sense or realist viewpoint, meaning that a single objective, knowable reality exists, to a viewpoint of regarding reality and experience as constructed from individual-experience level to social-experience level. Constructed experiences, or how people make sense of the world, are embedded in their stories that consist of words and metaphors.

The term **unknown** does not mean to include that which can never be known, but means to include that, which is not yet known, and needs to be discovered, or that which is still not known well and needs to be explored further, especially when it might be strange or foreign. Unknown always holds the potential of new, and need not be feared. It does however challenge one to change, especially when the unknown is avoided or, for that matter, something new. This change may be mostly intra-personal, psychological or spiritual, in terms of one's attitude and thinking towards the unknown, but this may be an important aspect that characterised participants in this study in terms of their boldness to step into the unknown.

### 1.10 Quality of life (QOL)

It generally seems that most people aspire to be happy and successful and live a **good life**; that is a good quality life, having meaning and purpose. But, one would then ask, how one would be able to reach these aspirations, what it would entail to reach them, what one would have to do to reach them, how one would measure once they have been reached, and what the experience would be like in reaching them. It is for this reason that the researcher's research interest was in the area of QOL, and specifically on the subjective part thereof. To date QOL studies have been concerned with both the objective and subjective sides to QOL and have also been promulgating looking at both sides complementing each other, as well as having a multidimensional approach towards such studies (Alkire & Sarwar, 2009; Diener & Suh, 1997; Eurostat Statistics Explained, 2013b).

Eurostat Statistics Explained (2013a) refers to the **8+1 dimensions of QOL**, as “an overarching framework for the measurement of well-being” (p. 3). The first eight dimensions, **material living conditions (income, consumption and material conditions)**, **productive or main activity**, **health**, **education**, **leisure and social interactions**, **economic and physical safety**, **governance and basic rights**, and **natural and living environment** generally refer to the objective and/or social indicators of QOL (some of them partly also include subjective measurements), while the last dimension, indicated as **overall experience of life**, pertains largely to the subjective experience of QOL. In measuring this dimension, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD's) *Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being*, is followed. Within

these guidelines, self-reported and survey based measures are still used (OECD, 2013). The OECD's mission is to "promote policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world" (OECD.org, 2017, p. 1).

It seems that subjective QOL study measures are predominantly relying either on social indicators or surveys/questionnaires for data information (Efklides, Kalaitzidou, & Chankin, 2003; Hagerty & Veenhoven, 2003; Sörös & Pető, 2015). However, a call towards recommendations for new indicators of QOL has been made (Eurostat Statistics Explained, 2013a).

In general therefore, within the broader context of QOL studies, a lack of qualitative study measurement methods to determine subjective QOL exists. Although a study conducted by Palepu, Hubley, Russell, Gadermann, and Chinni (2012) used focus groups to determine QOL themes among Canadian homeless youths, there still seems to be a lack of qualitative gathering and analysis methods, especially through the interviewing method, to determine subjective QOL. The current study hereby attempts a start towards determining subjective QOL through focussing primarily on people's subjective experiences, as well as collecting data through interviewing as means of providing useful information in a storytelling form.

### **1.11 Delimitation of the study**

The current study was not investigating objective QOL. Therefore, the various dimensions of QOL used as a framework for the measurement of well-being, such as the first eight dimensions mentioned earlier were not included in the current study. This study only intended to investigate the subjective part of the dimension **overall experience of life** as a QOL experience among a selected South African group of participants. Furthermore, the study did not set out to investigate in detail each participant's individual background and context within which each one lived daily. The contexts provided by participants' stories, along with additional contextual information gathered through the RoL drawings and other sources, were used.

According to the current researcher, sufficient context was provided in the detailed information received about the low and high point experiences, as well as the turning-point experience. The idea was that each participant's turning-point experience was contextualised within their own low and high point experiences and, thereafter, the shared experiences of the total group of participants were contextualised in terms of shared contexts among themselves, the broader environmental (South African) context, the background story context of other (known) rags to riches stories, as well as the theoretical context in respect of literature.

Thirdly, the current study did not entail life history and narrative research, which could be closely related to the study's approach and design. The idea was not to create a story or narrative of the participant's life (biography or life history) or use the narrative analysis technique in looking at metaphors, linguistic practices used or the embedded discourses between researcher and narrators (Chase, 2011; Kawulich & Holland, 2012).

### **1.12 Significance of the study**

The study's aim was to gain in-depth knowledge and understanding of participants' turning-point experiences, to determine what psychological and/or spiritual aspects were involved during these experiences, and to present a model based on participants' themes, which could be used as a suggestion to others in similar circumstances, in enabling them to move from a low to a high point experience in their lives. The significance of the current research study would therefore be its contribution to positive psychology theory, and offering suggestions to expand current viewpoints on aspects regarding turning-point experiences. It offers insight into what participants of such experiences thought, felt, said, did and/or believed to allow them to have a turning-point experience on a psychological as well as spiritual level. In addition, it offers a theme-model that can be used as a tool to employ in a person's life, and be helpful in overcoming negative situations. Lastly, it also offers a distinctly subjective view on what a positive meaningful life entails and a way to subjectively measure QOL in terms of meaning found within a turning-point experience. Moreover, it could prompt the consideration for conceptualisation of the creating ability of human beings.

### **1.13 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the current study emanated from the researcher's interest in certain individuals' ability to withstand the calamities of the past and afterwards are able to experience a new improved (higher) state of subjective QOL. In the next chapters the following will be provided: the historical theoretical background in forming an approach to the current study (Chapter 2); the theoretical perspective or framework and approach used (Chapter 3); the broader context and a few background success stories existing and/or known in the world today (Chapter 4); and how the researcher was conducting the study to obtain the required information for analysis (Chapter 5). Chapter 5 will contain the research approach, design, objectives, and ethical considerations of the study.

The last chapters will provide information on the current study, namely the findings of the study through the individual participants' stories (Chapter 6); and detailed discussion, interpretation of the findings and integration of information; limitations of the study; future directions for research; and conclusion of the study (Chapter 7).

## CHAPTER TWO

### DESCRIBING A BETTER LIFE: AN APPROACH TO THE STUDY

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the background information relating to the research study to understand why it interested the researcher and why it was conducted in the first place. In this chapter, the broader context within which the study was formulated will be provided. Various important concepts will be discussed to indicate from which viewpoint the researcher approached the participants' stories. Although, in the study itself, specific contexts would become more apparent, this chapter concerns itself with providing the grounds for understanding the aspects, which would be discovered and investigated. This chapter further functions as the source of contextual information provided to the reader to be able to assign proper meaning to the participants' experiences.

#### 2.2 The broader context of the study: Quality of life (QOL)

##### 2.2.1 What is QOL in this study?

Generally speaking, QOL refers to having or living **a good life**. But what is a good life? Is it a life that is average, or above average? Is it a life that is better than the life of most other people or is it a life better than the one a person had before? QOL is a widely used term to indicate a person's, or even a society's general well-being (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2016). This term may refer to various concepts such as happiness, enjoyment, meaning, life satisfaction, fulfilment of needs, life potential, spiritual well-being, as well as experiencing a good life or a life of high quality, which seems to arise when a subjective appraisal is made by the individual experiencing QOL (Bowles & Picano, 2006; Efklides et al., 2003; Global Development Research Centre [GDRC], n.d.; Matheis, Tulskey, & Matheis, 2006; Ventegodt, Merrick, & Andersen, 2003).

QOL may also be objectively defined to include aspects such as living conditions or circumstances such as a personal standard of living, and aspects of life expectancy, health, education, material goods/wealth, economic and social context (Efklides et al., 2003; GDRC, n.d.; Malkinah-Pykh, 2001; Ruggeri, Bisoffi, Fontecedro, & Warner, 2001; Ventegodt et al., 2003). Subjective viewing of QOL tends to focus more on the specific area of individual experience, while viewing QOL objectively tends to focus more on the general experience of QOL and what it means for a society (Eurostat Statistics Explained, 2013a). Møller (cited in Gaibie & Davids, 2009) goes further by regarding the experience of a country's QOL and how this is determined through how well its

occupants live. Alkire and Sarwar (2009) take a multi-dimensional approach toward determining a society's well-being by linking it with its progress and development as a society.

In an attempt to define QOL for the current study, the original intension was to regard QOL only in terms of the subjective appraisal or experience of a person – meaning how the individual perceives her/his own life, not necessarily comparing it with the life of another. What would be important to the researcher on the subjective level was how the individual person would regard her/his life after the experience of a low point from which she/he was able to move away and reach a high point. Perhaps then, some would regard their lives as **very good**. For the researcher the minimum requirement to qualify as having **a good (quality of) life** would be seen from the person's own point of view, meaning to subjectively regard her/himself to be in a better , rather than a worse state, after the low point experience in her/his life. A very useful and preferred way of defining the subjective part of QOL for the current study would then be “the subjective judgement of the extent to which one is living the good life. This perception of the good life may be based on feelings of happiness, meaning in life, and inner peace” (Psychology and Society, n.d., p. 1). QOL, in terms of a person having **more** than before, or through the expression of words such as ‘better’, ‘happier’ or ‘improved’ would serve as further indications of QOL.

In terms of the objective nature of QOL, which entails the objective evaluation of QOL, no developed or formal instrument was used to determine what this would be for the current study. QOL in the current study would also become relevant through the analysis of the participants' life stories as a combined group, for example in comparison with each other and analysing similarities. According to Psychology and Society (n.d.), if a person is “happy, and has inner peace, and perceives that his or her life is meaningful, then the person could be viewed as being successful and achieving a high quality of life” (p. 1). Good life in the current study would therefore have the meaning of having achieved, increased, gained, progressed, grown or matured in various forms, as viewed from the high point position, which is then significantly different from the previous ‘low QOL’ or low point experience and position. These forms may include achievements such as obtaining a qualification or medals, status such as being married or selected for a team, being financially independent or comfortable compared to previously being financially poor or dependent, and/or grown to be spiritually or personally more mature.

### **2.2.2 Developments in measuring QOL**

As QOL studies gained much momentum over the last years, developments in QOL measurement tend to focus on multidimensional and integrative model approaches (Alkire & Sarwar, 2009;

Ventegodt et al., 2003). Such models would combine subjective and objective elements of measuring QOL. Interestingly enough, Ventegodt et al. (2003) also used existential QOL as part of their theoretical framework. To them the existential part lies at a deeper level, which might be closely related to having inner happiness, finding deeper meaning in life and being internally fulfilled. A study by Matheis et al. (2006) was conducted showing the relationship between spirituality and QOL of spinal cord injury individuals. They used two distinctions for spirituality called **religious spirituality** and **existential spirituality**. The former is indicative of a relationship between the person and God/higher power and the latter of a worldview held by the person concerning their life's purpose, meaning and value. The study found existential spirituality to be a significant predictor of global QOL.

### 2.2.3 Subjective QOL aspects

In defining the subjective part of QOL, it is clear that it involves the subjective judgement of the individual, group or society, which constitutes a perception of that aspect of life that makes it good. It was also indicated that this perception is based on “feelings of happiness, meaning in life, and inner peace” (Psychology and Society, n.d., p. 1). Important psychological aspects pertaining to QOL include the thoughts and feelings involved, as well as the idea of happiness or satisfaction in or about life, the meaning one has in her/his life and being content or at peace within oneself. The last two aspects of meaning in life and inner peace could also be related to the transcendental or spiritual aspect of QOL. Although QOL applies to a wide range of fields and contexts such as physical and mental health care, employment, education, economics, politics, social relations and recreation, the current study was mainly interested in applying QOL to the context of mental and spiritual health. The World Health Organization's ([WHO], 2018) defines QOL as “an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns” (p. 1). Although it includes the context of the culture and value system within which a person lives, this was not included as part of the current study's scope. How a person perceives her/his life in relation to her/his goals and expectations, did however form part of the scope of QOL for the current study.

As described above, the subjective appraisal aspect of experiencing a good life or a life of high quality included various psychological concepts, but it also referred to those concepts ensuring spiritual well-being (Bowles & Picano, 2006; Efklides et al., 2003; GDRC, n.d.; Matheis et al., 2006; Ventegodt et al., 2003). Spiritual concepts that form part of QOL studies include spirituality, religiousness, beliefs, purpose/meaning of life, faith, forgiveness, hope, and peace, to mention a few (O'Connell & Skevington, 2010; Krägeloh, Billington, Henning, & Chai, 2015; Albers et al., 2010;



Land, Michalos, & Sirgy, 2012). A great part of QOL therefore entails psychological as well as spiritual aspects present in the individual's subjective evaluation of her/his own life.

In the current study, South African research participants were interviewed to determine, according to their own point of view, what their QOL was for a specific point in time and relating to a specific experience. Whatever was found and highlighted in terms of QOL through the current study would only be transferrable to similar participants in similar situations. The findings of this study may, however, be worth sharing and become very informative to fellow South Africans who find themselves in similar situations as the participants found themselves in, and gain insight into what could be done to improve their own QOL. Although research on QOL to date is wide-ranging, covering various aspects of the quality of humanity's lived experience, the current study was interested in exploring the active and subjective involvement of an individual person in terms of her/his psychological and spiritual QOL experience. Formal objective measurement of the QOL experience did not take place, but the measurement of subjective QOL experience emerging from and highlighted in this study could serve as an important indicator of how participants are subjectively involved in their own experiences of QOL.

### **2.3 The emerging theoretical approach to the study**

The researcher was set on exploring and discovering knowledge about the experiences of certain individuals to enable him to develop and/or contribute to existing knowledge about certain experiences people may have had. The researcher therefore investigated the experience of people who had previously been at a low point in their lives and then described what happened that enabled them to move beyond this point and reach a high point. In leading up to this exploration, the researcher has been exposed to many psychological theories. Certain theories were selected for this study for various reasons.

As studying the human lived experience was a main focus point, the researcher selected the existential/phenomenological/humanistic theories. As the overall experiences are being regarded as positive, the positive psychology theory was selected. The researcher was further interested in what people would think or feel during their experience, and thereby included the cognitive and emotions/emotional intelligence theories. To investigate the spiritual aspects, the theories on transpersonal psychology, religion and psychology of religion were selected. Social psychology theory was selected for its contribution in studying unique concepts such as attitude and self, but also for studying individuals in relationships, which provide contextual understanding for people's

lived experiences. Thus, the background to psychological theory along with the main theories relating to the current study will be discussed further.

### 2.3.1 Theory

Theory, according to Train et al. (2009), is “any abstract knowledge or reasoning that we use to help us understand or explain phenomena” (p. 32). They postulate that the kinds of phenomena studied in psychology “are mostly related to the way people think, act and feel” (p. 12). Theory is about explanations and generalisations of the relationships between variables (Visagie, 2010). Other definitions of theory include words such as systematic, explanations of observations and facts, general truth statements, and a formal set of ideas intended to explain why something happens or exists (Babbie & Mouton, 2006; Ciccarelli & White, 2014; Turnbull, 2010; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). Theories basically provide explanations of why something happened or exists.

Theory becomes more useful when it can be applied to different and/or similar contexts or situations and not only to specific situations or limited contexts. Although it could provide more clarity and insight to specific contexts, theory strives to be able to address a more universal context as part of being the result of the scientific research approach to explain and generally understand human nature and behaviour (Visagie, 2010). Theory can be seen as a representative model of understanding or an explanation of what happens in the world we live in. In psychology theory, it involves description as well as understanding of phenomena relating to people to enable psychologists to make predictions and discoveries about humans and their behaviour (Train et al., 2012).

### 2.3.2 Psychology as a science

The term psychology stems from two words: the Latin word *psyche*, meaning **spirit** or **soul** and the Greek word *logos*, meaning **study** (Train et al., 2009). Psychology therefore literally means the study of the **human** spirit or soul. Although psychological thought has its roots in philosophy and the biological and medical sciences, it is generally accepted that psychology became an approved science in 1879 when Wilhelm Wundt applied scientific principles in a laboratory setting to study the human mind (Ciccarelli & White, 2017). The context or worldview regarding human nature and development, as thought of in terms of psychology as a science, is sometimes categorised as the pre-modern, modern and post-modern contexts or viewpoints (Train et al., 2009). Within the pre-modern context, the world was largely influenced by strong religious traditions, which played a major role in how human nature and the human spirit or soul was seen. The pre-modernistic viewpoint also had a significant effect on how psychology would develop as a science. One such

influence would be the prominent role that authority played as part of the pre-modern viewpoint and how it changed during the modern viewpoint, for example, replacing the authority that God/church/religion and faith had with human reasoning (Viljoen, 2013a).

Various factors led to the establishing of psychology as a science, such as the influence of scientific thought, characterised by observation and rationalisation, the need to study human phenomena experimentally and objectively, the need to determine causes of behaviour, as well as the need to be able to scientifically test and prove findings (Boundless.com, 2016a; Ciccarelli & White, 2014; Train et al., 2011). Applying scientific principles and methods could be regarded as the beginning of the modernism viewpoint of human nature. The modernistic viewpoint, which developed mainly within the Western paradigm, have been criticised for attempting to study human nature objectively, as it is generally assumed that a major part of behaviour is subjectively influenced and, thus, consideration of individual uniqueness, personal feelings and thoughts become important in understanding the reality of human nature, human spirit or the soul (Train et al., 2009).

Consequently, the post-modernism viewpoint developed wherein the individual's thoughts and feelings were recognised along with the context within which people functioned. Individual behaviour within a society, in conjunction with how reality is subjectively and collectively constructed, plays a more prominent role and is considered important when studying human nature or spirit. Post-modernism takes into account the richness of diversity and respects the unique experiences of individuals, but it is also subjected to criticism when applied in extreme ways (Train et al., 2009).

Rather than to recognise each separate and different viewpoint as a true reflection of the reality of human nature, according to Train et al. (2009) and Wilbur (2000; 2001) it is generally accepted that an integrated viewpoint provides the best approach. From this viewpoint, human nature and behaviour, and therefore the spirit and the soul, are best understood by combining different perspectives in order to explain and understand the various and different aspects human nature. An integrated approach values the contribution that each viewpoint makes and is generally the most effective when endeavouring to study, understand, describe and explain human experiences and, as a result, draw theoretical conclusions.

### **2.3.3 Research in psychology**

Generally there are two major distinctions made concerning research in psychology – the focus is either on basic research or applied research. According to Breckler (2006) basic research involves testing hypotheses to obtain a principal or fundamental understanding of what is being studied,

while applied psychology is practical in nature, focussing on solving problems. In the latter form of research, scientific principles and knowledge are followed (Hub Pages, 2011). The role of a researcher in psychology would either be to improve and expand knowledge and theory about psychological phenomena, or to address specific psychological issues leading to the practical application of knowledge gained in solving these issues. In the current study the basic research approach was followed.

#### **2.3.4 Research in psychology in the current study**

Researchers in psychology usually specialise in a particular field or area of research (Train et al., 2009). The current research study is interested in various aspects from the different post-modern psychology fields of interest, but its main focus is on the humanistic (existential/phenomenological) psychology and the positive psychology fields of interest. Psychology, as it exists today, has been formed by many psychology theories, although only some are considered and regarded applicable to the study's theoretical background and will hence be discussed to assist the reader in understanding the theoretical background and nature of the current study.

In following the basic research approach, this study's main aim is to gain theoretical knowledge by investigating and understanding basic aspects and characteristics underlying the research participants' experiences. Although basic and applied research may study the same psychological phenomenon, a distinction exists in the different perspectives from which the research is approached (Durrheim, 2006). If, for instance, the effect of a policy on human behaviour is investigated, the basic research approach may be to investigate the underlying aspects of the policy itself and how it contributes to the specific behaviour observed. Here the underlying motives and theoretical aspects concerning the behaviour might be thoroughly investigated to provide proper understanding. The applied research approach may then, for instance, focus on the direct influence of the policy on human behaviour, how it may be implemented and if it is not working, what needs to be done to improve it. In contrast to the basic approach, which is theoretical in nature, the applied approach is more practical in nature, directed to apply the knowledge gained to practical problems and orientated towards social action and decision-making (Durrheim, 2006; Train et al., 2009).

#### **2.4 Psychological theories**

The psychology theories that formed the background to this study's theoretical approach will now be discussed.

### 2.4.1 Introduction

It is generally accepted that psychological theory historically has its roots in classical Greek philosophy and that it formed an integral part of philosophy for some time (Viljoen, 2013a). Philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle are regarded as those “who laid down the basic principles of human behaviour, particularly with regard to the structure and functions of the soul or mind (psyche)” (Viljoen, 2013a, p. 24). Various current theories in psychology explain human nature and behaviour. Some of these theories are uniquely psychological in nature when compared to other disciplines such as the physical sciences and are concerned with unique human experiences, such as emotions, consciousness, quality of and meaning in life or personal will power (Efklides & Moraitou, 2013).

Psychological theories have developed over many years and have been influenced by various contexts. According to Viljoen (2013a) psychology developed through stages, of which one was when psychology formed part of religious and philosophical thinking. This was followed by a stage when it was part of the natural sciences. During this latter stage, reasoning became more important and there was a move towards focussing on the human being. Two important philosophical influences on psychology emerged during this stage, namely empiricism, proposing that knowledge can only be truly gained through empirical observation and inductive reasoning; and rationalism, proposing that true knowledge is to be gained through subjective experience and consciousness of oneself.

After psychology became a science in itself in the modernism context, theories in psychology expanded rapidly, leading up to the post-modernism context where many branches of psychology exist today. The current researcher became particularly interested in certain branches of psychology through the years, such as humanistic, cognitive, personality and social psychology. Humanistic psychology is concerned with studying the “whole person” (McLeod, 2015, p. 1). What specifically interested the current researcher in this field was that people are motivated and driven by certain needs, they make choices about their behaviour, they are unique and each person is important and consists of a **self** and has a self-concept (McLeod, 2008). Cognitive psychology is concerned, amongst other things, with thinking processes, language, motivation and emotions, while personality psychology is interested in the uniqueness of people and investigates the individual differences amongst people and specifically the personality of a person (Train et al., 2009). Social psychology studies the relationships within and between individuals and amongst groups, the impact of the social environment on behaviour and specific issues such as attitudes, attraction and aggression (Train et al., 2009).

Other more recent fields of interest in psychology include positive psychology, psychology of religion and transpersonal/spiritual psychology (Loewenthal, 2004; Moss, 1999; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology is concerned with positive human development and investigates positive human experiences, for example happiness and well-being, and is interested in aspects such as a meaningful life, positive relationships, values, strengths and talent (Positive psychology, 2015; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Spiritual psychology stems from transpersonal psychology and is concerned with studying the spiritual aspects relating to human experiences, which may include states of consciousness, religious experience and spiritual self-development (Lajoie & Shapiro, 1992; Loewenthal, 2004; Moss, 1999).

#### **2.4.2 Existential psychology**

The first theory, which is considered as important in providing a background to the current study, is the existential psychology theory. According to Meyer et al. (2013) the term ‘existentialism’ originates from the Latin word *existere*, meaning “‘to stand outside oneself’ or ‘to appear’ or ‘to step out’” (p. 329). Thus, the term suggests that an individual can transcend her/himself as a being “who is becoming” and that “human beings can be more than they are” (p. 329). Existential psychology has its roots in the philosophical viewpoints of the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (JRank.org, 2016). He differed from the popular viewpoint of Descartes, who proclaimed, ‘I think therefore I am’, as he was against a totalistic viewpoint of intellectualising the truth about human existence (Viljoen, 2013a). Although Descartes started to highlight the importance of subjective experience and conscious knowledge, which he saw as the basis of all knowledge, his philosophical approach of rationalism over-emphasised the idea that human behaviour is to be understood mainly as comprising of intellectual or cognitive processes (Viljoen, 2013a). Along with the influence of other philosophers, such as Nietzsche, Jaspers, Heidegger and Satre, existentialism especially highlighted the subjective experience of human existence and the fact that it is a process during which humans develop and change.

Some of the main contributions to psychology emerging from the core principles of existentialism are that people have the ability to self-reflect and think about their own existence, that they have the ability to transcend their limitations by having ideals and setting goals; as well as their circumstances, by choice and through maintaining a certain attitude (Viljoen, 1988). Another important concept that emerged from this viewpoint is that people strive to live and have an authentic life based on what they want as individuals and not just what is prescribed to them by others. According to this view, life is what you make of it. Yalom (cited in Murdock, 2013) recently accentuated two important existential themes of a human being’s existence, namely that of freedom,

or freedom to choose being the author of one's own life's design and actions; and meaning, which is unique to each person and may sometimes only be found through difficulty and in suffering.

The significant influence of Victor Frankl, as an existential-humanist, on the development of psychological theory cannot be denied. The main contribution that he made to the development of psychological theory was the introduction of freedom of choice, and people being motivated through searching for meaning in their lives (Frankl, 1992). Through his own experiences of surviving the Nazi concentration camp during World War II, he postulated that even in suffering one has a certain degree of choice, and that those who had found a sense of meaning in their lives, even in those dreadful circumstances, had the best chance to survive or overcome their suffering and circumstances. Frankl has further contributed to understanding human nature by indicating three dimensions of existence, namely the physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions. The physical dimension is described as "a complex biochemical mechanism", the psychological dimension as the needs and drives, similar to those of animals, while the spiritual dimension is the unique dimension to being human (Shantall, 2013, p. 443). In having this spiritual capability, human beings have a free will, they are free to choose their attitudes and actions, they can change themselves and the world around them, direct their own behaviour, and be self-aware in thinking about themselves and their experiences.

Frankl's views contribute to the current study, especially in highlighting the role of motivation, choices and the spiritual dimension of human nature. His view on how a person, in spite of unbearable and insufferable (negative) circumstances, is able to overcome adversity and live a fulfilling life afterwards, contributed significantly to the current study. Frankl's theory indicates that a person develops optimal functioning over time and generally grows towards reaching full spirituality (Frankl, 1992). The theory stresses various aspects that people possess for optimal functioning. These include the free will to self-determine their actions, and ultimately their fate; having a realistic perception of themselves and their circumstances; being able to self-transcend through being challenged; aspiring to have meaning in their lives; applying humour to distance themselves from their troubles; being future directed, for instance seeing possibilities, having goals and using opportunities; seeing their work or duties as a "vocation" (i.e. or a calling; appreciating "goodness, beauty and truth"; being open to new experiences; respecting and appreciating others; and, finding meaning in suffering (Shantall, 2013, pp. 452-454).

### 2.4.3 Phenomenological psychology

Another important theory in providing a background to this study is the phenomenological psychology theory. The father of phenomenological psychology is generally regarded to be the philosopher, Edmond Husserl, who expanded on the existential approach (Kruger, 1988). In an expansion on the existential approach that stresses the importance of the individual's perception of her/his world, Husserl accentuated the importance of the individual assigning personal meaning to experience (Husserl, 2012; Meyer et al., 2013).

According to the Faculty of Health and Human Sciences of the University of Hertfordshire (University of Hertfordshire [UH], 2017) phenomenology refers to “a person's perception of the meaning of an event, as opposed to the event as it exists externally to (outside of) that person” (p. 1). The individual intentionally and consciously attends to things in the outside world, thereby **going out to the world** (Husserl, 2012; Kruger, 1988; Meyer et al., 2013). The influence of Kant's philosophy on phenomenological psychology led to the view that reality or the truth can only be discovered through what the individual thinks or knows about it or how she/he experiences it (Meyer et al., 2013). The individual assigns knowledge or truth to an experience. For the researcher then to understand the experience properly, in accordance to the words of Husserl (1982) he should “accept [what] is really to be seen in the phenomenon precisely as it presents itself rather than interpreting it away, and to honestly describe it” (p. 257).

Friedman and Schustack (2012) explain the phenomenological view as the viewpoint held by researchers according to which a person's subjective perception and view on reality are considered valid for investigation. It becomes therefore important to consider the individual's own perception of a situation in order to understand the person's experience from her/his point of view. Phenomenology not only concerns itself with the individual's experience of a phenomenon, but also her/his interpretation thereof (UH, 2017). In short, phenomenological psychology is the study of subjective experiences and perceptions, as well as consciousness (Friedman & Schustack, 2012; Husserl, 2012; Smith, 2016). Within phenomenological studies various types of experiences are described ranging from “perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and volition to bodily awareness, embodied action, and social activity, including linguistic activity” (Smith, 2016, p. 2).

It becomes important to the researcher to be able to discover and describe the research participant's subjective perception of a situation or experience in her/his life to enable him to properly analyse the shared information (Meyer et al., 2013). In the current study, the focus is on the individuals'



perceptions of what their low and high points were and also their perceptions of what the factors were that enabled them to move from the low to the high. These perceptions must then be recognised as the true knowledge of their experience. The research goal is to determine what meaning is assigned to their subjective conscious experiences of a phenomenon.

#### **2.4.4 Humanistic psychology**

Post-Freudians and humanists, such as Jung, Adler, Maslow and Rogers, in contrast to psychoanalysts, such as Freud, were optimistic and positive in their approach to human nature (Barlow & Durand, 2012). Humanistic psychology focuses on the uniqueness and individuality of people, their potential, as well as ability to give direction to their own lives (Boundless.com, 2016b; Ciccarelli & White, 2017). According to the humanistic view, people develop to their full potential and therefore concepts such as meaning, human potential and self-actualisation are included (Boundless.com, 2016b). Kruger (1987) highlights certain topics investigated from this viewpoint, which are unique to a human being, such as concepts, imagination, criticism and creativity. Humans are further unique in having **free will** and the ability to strive for **self-actualisation** in order to reach their full potential (Ciccarelli et al. (2017). Humans have the “freedom to choose their own destiny” (p. 33).

Self-actualisation is an assumption of humanistic theory, whereby it is believed that all people can reach their full or highest potential, because they are free to grow, but circumstances and outside influences might obstruct them from reaching it (Barlow & Durand, 2012). Maslow (1994), as a proponent of humanistic psychology, emphasised a person’s potential and also recognised that a person is motivated to grow and develop personally. He is well known for his development of the hierarchy of needs, whereby people strive to satisfy and fulfil certain needs in a hierarchical manner, for example basic, security, social and affiliation needs, to ultimately fulfil their full potential, which represents the need for self-actualisation (Moore, 2013). This hierarchy of needs is a systematic way of describing peoples’ motivation to behave, starting from the basic physical needs (hunger and sex) building up through safety and social needs (shelter and friendship) to the need for self-fulfilment or self-actualisation (Barlow & Durand, 2012). An important aspect of the hierarchy is that people need to fulfil their lower needs before they attend to or are motivated toward the higher needs (Maslow, 1999).

One of the most important concepts that Maslow introduced to the understanding of human nature, and which influenced the current study significantly, is the concept of optimal development. According to Maslow (1994; 1999), an optimal or peak functioning person functions at the highest

level, namely (i.e. self-actualisation and regularly satisfies the needs from all the preceding levels. Maslow was criticised for the fact that some people evidently indicated that they are able to function at the highest hierarchical level without lower level needs being satisfied, for example martyrs and musicians striving to achieve greatness in spite of suffering and poverty (Moore, 2013).

Carl Rogers, another proponent of humanistic psychology, is known for his contributions to counselling and psychotherapy. He is regarded as the originator of client-centred, now known as person-centred therapy. During this kind of therapy an individual is allowed to play a major role in his or her own development or changes in order to progress psychologically (Rogers, 1995). His person-centred approach of reflecting or mirroring what the client said in helping her/him find their own answers at their own pace in dealing with problems, contributed significantly in understanding people better (Kruger, 1987). According to Barlow and Durand (2012), the aim of client- or person-centred therapy is that a person would be “more straightforward” with her/himself and that she/he will “access their innate tendencies toward growth” (p. 20). Some of the main concepts that Rogers introduced to understanding human nature and behaviour, which influenced the current study significantly, are the subjective role that each person plays in her/his own development and growth, the idea that each person is regarded as inherently good, and that, ideally, each person should reach her/his full potential (Moore, 1988). More so, Rogers’ approach highlighted the importance of the client being able to find solutions to her/his own problems and being personally able to effect change in her/himself, in becoming their own counsellor (McLeod, 2011).

Rogers also emphasized empathy in therapy, through sensitive listening by the counsellor, reflecting back to the client, and showing acceptance and genuineness, as well as the idea of the **self** (McLeod, 2011; Moore, 1988; Rogers, 1995). Although various **selves** (i.e. perceived, actual and ideal self), may exist for each person, the ideal is to find congruence in oneself and to be one’s own self (Kruger, 1987). A further concept that emerged from Rogers’ approach to therapy was that the person was to find solutions and comply with her/his own evaluations and norms set by themselves, rather than to comply with norms set by others (Kruger, 1987). Rogers was criticised for accentuating the positive characteristics of being human, thereby not giving sufficient attention to negative characteristics, such as aggression, hate and selfishness; and because it was difficult to measure or define the **ideal self**-concept.

Humanistic psychology is phenomenological in nature as it considers the individual’s subjective experience (McLeod, 2015). One of the main premises of the humanistic approach is the importance of the individual as a human being and the role she/he plays in their own development and experience of life. In this regard Bugental (1964) highlights five basic postulates for humanistic

psychology: viewing man (a human) as superseding “the sum of his parts”; “has his being in a human context”; “is aware”; “has choice”; and “is intentional” (pp. 23-24). The humanistic approach further accentuates the role of interpersonal relationship(s) in the development of a human being (Barlow & Durand, 2012).

#### **2.4.5 Cognitive psychology**

Cognitive psychology theory may be regarded as an “independent field of specialisation” in psychology (Viljoen, 2013a, p. 34). This theory was developed due to renewed interest in consciousness, especially cognition, which is seen as all the intellectual or mental processes involved when knowledge is accumulated (Train et al., 2009). The mental processes that people employ influence their behaviour, and although they are abstract, such processes can be studied scientifically.

Cognitive psychology concerns itself with thinking processes such as attention, perception, problem-solving and memory (Elsevier, 2017). The main focus is on human mental processes and how it affects human behaviour. Cognitive theory does not only include mental processes, but also “feeling, thinking, remembering, learning, problem-solving, and other such processes” (Train et al., 2009, p. 15). More recently, cognitive psychology has been expanded as a result of the application of modern techniques and instruments to measure the neurological functions of human beings to improve understanding of human nature and behaviour. This is especially relevant in the field of neuropsychology (Ciccarelli & White, 2017).

Kelly (1963) is regarded as an important contributor to the development of cognitive psychology theory. He found that clients could be helped through a change in their own interpretations of their circumstances, in essence to view things differently (Kelly, 1963). Some of the most important concepts that were introduced and that influenced the current study, are the concepts of people having a “basic motive to understand their environment”, that they want to “interpret, predict and control” their circumstances, and that they are consciously and actively involved through forming their own concepts and constructs about phenomena in their environment (Meyer & Moore, 2013, p. 422). Kelly (1963) posed the notion of **alternative constructions**, which means there are alternative ways of thinking available to a person in dealing with the challenges of the world around her/him. He highlighted that an individual’s constructions of the world have an effect on her/his functioning within the world (Kelly, 1963).

In focussing on human functioning rather than human nature, Kelly (1963) also pointed out that human beings like to anticipate, predict and control events. People have different ways of

constructing the world around them and their interpretations influence them subjectively, meaning their subjective knowledge about the external world influences their experience of reality. Although they are free to determine their own behaviour based on their constructs or interpretations, they are limited or bound in terms of their constructions (Meyer & Moore, 2013). In other words, one might not be able to change your external circumstances, but you may be able to change your perception thereof and thereby your constructions of the external reality.

More recently specific interest in the role of perceptions and interpretation of stimuli through the senses, as well as memory and metacognition has become important. Metacognition simply means “cognition about cognition” or “thoughts about thoughts” (Papaleontiou-Louca, 2008). Metacognition is normally associated with learning (Ciccarelli & White, 2017). Knowledge gained through the process of metacognition, meaning knowledge gained about cognitive processes, can be used to control future thinking processes (Livingston, 1997). The optimal functioning person has a fairly stable but flexible and effective construction system that rarely requires radical change and allows her/him to accurately predict events and have minimum negative experiences (Meyer & Moore, 2013). It has also been shown that metacognition improves the ability to set goals and to effectively achieve such goals (Livingston, 1997; Papaleontiou-Louca, 2008).

Kelly’s contribution towards phenomenology is through focusing on how the individual constructs and interprets her/his world, rather than the world itself (Meyer, 1988). How she/he views and experiences their world is also important. One of the most noteworthy ideas that cognitive psychology theory has contributed to the current research study, is the idea of how important and significant cognitive processes, perceptions and interpretations are in understanding the reasons why people behave the way they do and how this influences their behaviour, especially when change is required.

#### **2.4.6 Emotions and emotional intelligence**

The word emotion originated from the Medieval/Old French words *esmovoir/emouvoir*, (to stir up) and the Latin word *emovēre* (to remove); therefore emotion is derived from *e-* + *movēre* (to move) (Ciccarelli & White, 2017; Emotion, 2018). Emotion is defined as “the affective aspect of consciousness ... a state of feeling” (Emotion, 2018, p. 1). It involves feelings and includes joy, anger, sorrow and fear (Train et al., 2009). According to Ciccarelli and White (2017), the concepts **emotion** and **motivation** originate from the same root word, meaning ‘to move’. The relationship between the two concepts is found in the fact that motivation can be activated by emotion (Train et

al., 2009). In this sense, emotions **move** people to behave in a certain way, in other words, emotions could significantly influence our behaviour (Train et al., 2009).

Emotions have been studied in various scientific fields, such as cognitive and social psychology, neurosciences, medicine and sociology (Frontiers in Psychology, 2018; Psychologist World, 2017). Emotions consist of various components, like subjective feeling experiences, cognitive processes, psychological and behavioural expressions, biological reactions, and neural or mental states (Emotion, 2018; Very Well, 2017). According to Ciccarelli and White (2017), emotions are characterised by three parts, namely the physical arousal part, the behavioural part, where the emotions are expressed openly, and the inner awareness part, where one is aware of one's feelings. Therefore, emotions comprise of physical, behavioural and cognitive components (Train et al., 2009).

Emotional intelligence is regarded as a type of intelligence that people can apply to manage the complexity of emotions. It is defined as the “abilities to perceive, appraise, and express emotions accurately and appropriately, to use emotions to facilitate thinking, to understand and analyse emotions, to use emotional knowledge effectively, and to regulate one's emotions to promote both emotional and intellectual growth” (American Psychological Association [APA], 2017, p. 1). Ciccarelli and White (2017) add to the definition in stating that it is “the accurate awareness of and ability to manage one's own emotions ... attain specific goals ... the ability to be self-motivated, able to feel what others feel and socially skilled” (pp. 316 & 662). Accordingly it includes three skills, namely emotional awareness; the harnessing of emotions or the effective use of emotions in relation to thinking and problem-solving; managing emotions or controlling one's own emotions and cheering up or calming down others (Psychology Today, 2017a).

Emotional intelligence seems to help to identify and deal with negative emotions, reduces stress and anxiety associated with negative feelings, and assists people to effectively find positive solutions to problems in overcoming various life challenges (Psych Central, 2017). It is therefore noted that emotional intelligence enables people to exercise more control over emotions in certain circumstances and influences how certain situations are perceived and experienced emotionally. It further contributes towards better decision-making, success and living one's life “with intention, purpose, and autonomy” (p. 1) Nastasi (2016) pointed out that emotional intelligence is a very important predictor of job performance. It allows flexibility in goal-achieving and staying positive, while those lacking it may experience problems being motivated or have difficulty in adapting to new circumstances.

Although the concept of emotional intelligence did not form a formal part of the current study, the influence of emotions on the participants' experiences, as well as the effective dealing with negative emotions, could not be ignored. Emotions expressed with regards to the participants' experiences of their low point/s were more prominent than those expressed during their high point/s. However, emotions played a substantial role during participants' turning-point experiences (i.e. moving from the low to the high points).

The current study did not explore the emotional experience of the research participants in-depth, as the researcher was cautious not to evoke too many negative emotions within them in order to avoid creating new, or re-living previous negative experiences. The approach was to listen to and hear their experiences, mostly as re-called from their memories, giving a recount thereof of their own free will, telling their stories from a post-negative (low point) experience point of view, within or after an expected positive (high point) experience point of view. However, feelings are included as part of the research question and will therefore be considered when analysing the information. It was also noted that certain participants in the study were able to identify, manage and/or regulate their emotions very effectively.

#### **2.4.7 Social psychology**

The theoretical approach of social psychology is to study human nature and behaviour in a certain way. Social psychology is interested in all the aspects of people's "behaviour with and towards others" (Baron & Branscombe, 2012, p. xix). According to Train et al. (2009), social psychology concerns itself with studying the "individual in relation to the social environment" (p. 22). It is therefore a study of relationships. The social environment and interpersonal relationships have an important influence on people's behaviour. Being scientific in approach, social psychology focuses on the behaviour of both individuals and groups; it pursues the understanding of the causes of social behaviour, describing and explaining it within a changing social environment, with the aim of building a theory of principles concerning increased knowledge of such behaviour (Baron & Branscombe, 2012). The individualistic and personal aspects relating to the social psychology approach are pointed out in the definition of social psychology in Ciccarelli et al. (2017) as the "scientific study of how a person's thought, feelings, and behaviour are influenced by the real, imagined and implied presence of others" (p. 676).

Various concepts are considered in social psychology, such as social perception and cognition (e.g. self-fulfilling prophecy and attribution), attribution, attitude, attraction, friendship, intimate relationships, social identity or belonging to a group, the self (e.g. self-identity, self-esteem and

motivation), communication (e.g. verbal and non-verbal), conformity, aggression and stress, stereotypes and prejudice, and altruism or helping others (Baron & Branscombe, 2012; Kimble, 1990). This approach to understanding people accentuates the importance of the social environment in which people live, and it has been able to identify some unique themes concerning individual human behaviour. It has highlighted that human beings are social beings – people interact with one another and this plays an important role in their lives and influences their behaviour. From a social psychology perspective, social behaviour can be studied from two sides, namely the social behaviour as manifested within the individual, as well as social behaviour between individuals (Train et al., 2009). Most importantly, social psychology theory highlights the importance of the social context and how this determines a person's behaviour.

Although for the current study, the research participants were individually interviewed and their individual experiences investigated, certain concepts from the social psychology field had to be taken into account and considered, for instance, concepts relating to the self, attitude, receiving help from and helping others. Even though the idea of studying the individual as part of her/his own contextual social network group did not take precedence in the current study, the individual's unique experiences would later on be considered in context with each other as participants.

#### **2.4.8 Transpersonal psychology, religion and psychology of religion**

According to Train et al. (2009) transpersonal psychology, as a branch of psychology, focusses on “ways that humans can develop consciousness to become aware of realities that go beyond the physical and material world” (p. 17). Consciousness is defined as

the quality or state of being aware especially of something within oneself...  
being conscious of an external object, state, or fact... state of being characterized by  
sensation, emotion, volition, and thought... the state or quality of awareness... the  
totality of conscious states of an individual... the upper level of mental life of which the  
person is aware as contrasted with unconscious processes. (Consciousness, 2016, p. 1)

According to Ciccarelli and White (2017), consciousness refers to being aware of everything around oneself at any given moment. Consciousness is used to regulate our behaviour. In transpersonal psychology the experiences of altered states of consciousness, for example through meditation and in certain disciplines of yoga, is not excluded and the role of traditional healers not denied. With the development of modern techniques and equipment, the interest to investigate human consciousness has recently become a part of the cognitive sciences, especially neuropsychology. Other issues looked at by this form of psychology include “spiritual self-development, self beyond the ego, peak

experiences ... religious conversion, altered states of consciousness, spiritual practices, and other sublime and/or unusually expanded experiences of living” (Dängeli, 2017, p. 1).

Dängeli (2017) views transpersonal psychology as a “school of psychology that integrates the spiritual and transcendent aspects of the human experience with the framework of modern psychology” (p. 1). Transpersonal psychology concerns itself with the spiritual/transcendent aspects of human nature and experience (Moberg, 2001). Spiritual refers to the aspects of meaning, searching for the answers to life’s questions, relationship with the Divine or sacred and/or the transcendent and may include religiosity. It concerns the experience involved in being able to transcend or move beyond oneself. The subjective transcendent experience of people therefore forms an important part of the theoretical approach for the current study.

According to Dängeli (2017), transpersonal psychology can also be called spiritual psychology. Transpersonal psychology is linked with humanistic psychology as both involve people’s unique subjective experiences, including a previously ignored part of human nature, the spirit, as part of psychology; and both support the idea that the individual can develop, grow, move beyond or transcend to a higher state, or point of actualisation or well-being. The humanistic approach to the nature of being human acknowledges the spirit of a human being. According to Meyer et al. (2013), from a humanistic point of view, people lead their existence on three levels: physical, psychological and spiritual. On the spiritual level, the human spirit is creative, spontaneous and active with the “capacity to overcome hardship and despair” (Friedman & Schustack, 2012, p. 290). According to Dängeli (2017) transpersonal psychology also investigates human potentialities and includes concepts such as meaning, will, values, and creativity. It could therefore be noteworthy to recognise the spiritual part of being human and consider its importance when studies on human experiences involving these aspects are conducted.

Religion has been a part of the human being’s experience since humankind started inhabiting the earth. According to Nelson (2009) religion refers to “all aspects of the human relationship to the Divine or transcendent – that which is greater than us” (p. 3). Religion influences people’s emotions, habits, virtues and ways of thinking (Nelson, 2009). Studies in psychology of religion are mainly concerned with psychological states of people and have highlighted the important role that spirituality and religion play in many people’s lives (Loewenthal, 2004). During the past 40 years there has been an upsurge in psychology research studies containing religious dimensions, as well as an increase in publications on the subject of psychology of religion in psychology journals and textbooks (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003).



Psychology of religion involves the study of the human being's spiritual and religious experiences, how they are manifested and what they entail and mean to a person (Umeå University, n.d.). Religions have common features, such as religious behaviours, belief in a spiritual reality, purpose and morality (Loewenthal, 2004). Various indicators for religiosity have been indicated by Poloma and Pendleton (1991). Objective indicators include church attendance and/or membership, as well as frequency of prayer, while subjective indicators include religious experiences in prayer and being satisfied with one's state of religiosity, as well as closeness to God (Poloma & Pendleton, 1989a; 1991). They found that religiosity and prayer contribute significantly to a person's QOL and perceptions of well-being (Poloma & Pendleton, 1989b). Praying frequently and having a positive prayer experience, was a particularly strong predictor of well-being. Prayer seems to be a characteristic of many religions and can be seen as connecting oneself to a higher being for communication and/or closeness (Loewenthal, 2004).

The current study also investigated the spiritual aspects present when a person moves from a low point towards a high point. The spiritual aspects included the following three religious aspects: having faith in God or a Divine being; being religious (i.e. engaging in religious practices, such as prayer and forgiveness); and transcendence, as regarded in terms of the spiritual side of being human. Generally, this characteristic of a human being's experience of being able to transcend her/his circumstances, would be included within psychology theory and technically form part of the psychological aspects, but for the current study it was viewed in terms of spiritual aspects. Transcendence, as part of the spiritual aspects, included concepts or themes, such as having meaning in life and/or inner peace, overcoming or transcending dire circumstances, which further included characteristics/qualities such as hope, gratitude, humbleness, forgiveness, humour, happiness, fun, and creativity. As mentioned before, the spiritual aspects construct is closely associated with having a meaningful and worthy good QOL (even if only partly or as a once-in-a-life-time life-changing experience) characterised by certain positive good spiritual virtues, values and/or principles. Since formulating the concept for the research study, the researcher was most interested in this last aspect, namely to investigate and determine the Divine/creative potential of people in relation to changing their destiny – by changing their negative (low) life experience into a positive (high) life experience.

#### **2.4.9 Positive psychology**

The field of positive psychology has greatly informed the current study and constituted its main theoretical approach. Positive psychology is quite a recent approach to studying human nature (Science Direct, 2018). Lopez, Pedrotti and Snyder (2015) describe the theory of positive

psychology as a modern approach to the study of human behaviour, considering that people make their own decisions and with their unique choices and preferences, they could become skilful and productive, as well as actualised. According to them, what positive psychology essentially entails is “uncovering people’s strengths and promoting their positive functioning” (p. 3). Thus, positive psychology theory is an approach to investigate and understand human nature and behaviour by focusing on the positive, as well as the potential for fulfilment. Having a positive psychological approach to human functioning does not mean one is ignoring the negative. According to Linley, Joseph, Harrington, and Wood (cited in Austin et al., 2012) positive psychology is defined, as “the scientific study of optimal human functioning, which aims to redress the imbalance in psychology integrating the positive aspects of human functioning and experience with our own understanding of the negative aspects of human functioning and experience” (pp. 88-89). It recognises the importance of negative experiences in human well-being (Lewis, 2011).

Lewis (2011) says positive psychology “is about accruing a body of knowledge that is useful to people who want to live good, long, happy and productive lives ...” (p. 3). Positive psychology also investigates how strengths could contribute to an individual’s or a society’s capacity to thrive (Positive Psychology Center, 2016). Numerous important concepts are highlighted and addressed within positive psychology theory, such as happiness, life satisfaction, well-being, pleasure, positive emotions, flow, values, strengths, virtues, talents, creativity, innovation, hope, courage, bravery, persistence, integrity, humanity, kindness, social intelligence, forgiveness, mercy, self-control, altruism, personal growth, wisdom, self-knowledge, intimacy, gratitude, humour, and spirituality (Friedman & Schustack, 2012; Lewis, 2011; Lopez et al., 2015; Lyubomirsky, King & Diener, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Train et al., 2009).

As seen previously, it does not deny or ignore negative aspects of human nature. There is however a stronger drive in psychology towards the consideration of people’s strengths instead of just looking at their weaknesses (Emmons, 2017). Positive psychology therefore sets itself out to study human behaviour in terms of strengths and positive qualities or virtues (Positive psychology, 2015). According to Austin et al. (2012) it approaches human beings from a well-being perspective and disregards the view of regarding people as being ill or weak and “in-need-of-repair” (pp. 86-87). In order for effective long-term recovery to happen, the positive is facilitated, rather than treating the negative only (Austin et al., 2012). Although not denying the importance of human mental illness, pain and suffering, a balance of looking at strengths along with weaknesses is pursued through a positive psychological approach (Lopez et al., 2015).

According to Peterson (2006), positive psychologists are concerned with four major areas regarding human nature and behaviour, namely: **positive experience** (e.g. “happiness, zest, and flow”); **more enduring psychological traits** (e.g. “talents, interests, and strengths of character”); **positive relationships** (e.g. “between friends, family members, and colleagues”); and **positive institutions** (e.g. “families, schools, and youth development programs”) (p. 1). Seligman (2011b) has designed the PERMA-model consisting of five core elements of psychological well-being and happiness, which can help people to live a fulfilled, happy and meaningful life. The five core elements are positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and purpose, and accomplishments. Carol Ryff’s (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995) Six-factor Model of Psychological Well-being has contributed to an improved understanding of what well-being means, and can be regarded as very informative to the positive psychology field. Ryff (2017) used these dimensions in a self-report measure to evaluate a person’s psychological well-being. These six categories or dimensions consist of autonomy, self-acceptance, personal growth, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, and purpose in life. Scoring high on these dimensions is ideal.

Positive psychology is the main theoretical approach that influenced the current researcher to investigate aspects, which could contribute towards a positive change in people’s lives, ultimately constituting an improved, meaningful and fulfilling QOL experience. More specific positive psychological concepts will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

#### **2.4.10 Integral psychology**

In the final analysis of considering the various and different theories and approaches to understanding human nature and behaviour, the general belief amongst psychologists is to have an integral psychology approach (Train et al., 2009). The idea is that no developed psychology theory is more important than, or takes precedence over another, but rather that theories function complementary to each other in understanding human nature and behaviour (Wilber, 2000; 2001). The integral psychology theory concerns itself with four main aspects of human experience, namely: the individual’s interior experience, which includes the transpersonal, existential, gestalt, humanistic, cognitive and psychodynamic theories; the individual’s exterior experience, which includes the biological bases of behaviour, behaviourism and cognitive structures; the collective interior experience, which includes cultural psychology; and the collective exterior experience, which includes systems theories (Train et al., 2009).

## **2.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the researcher explained that QOL, as well as the psychological theories that interests and influenced him to formulate his approach, as a broad background to the current study. These theories stood out for him during his development as a scholar of psychology and their core principles appealed to him. To investigate the phenomenon of people having a (negative) low point experience and then be able to experience a (positive) high point thereafter, intrigued him as a researcher. He wanted to understand what the experience was like for people who moved from a low to a high (i.e. the turning-point experience); and also be able to describe their experiences from their own perspective, but within a positive framework. Therefore, the phenomenological approach within the positive psychology theoretical framework was chosen. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF EXPERIENCE FROM A POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE: A THEORETICAL APPROACH

#### 3.1 Introduction

As indicated in Chapter 2, phenomenological psychology is the study of subjective experience and consciousness, as seen from the individual's point of view (Kruger, 1988; Leahey, 2001; McLeod, 2015; Meyer et al. 2013). It was also indicated that a person's subjective perceptions and view of reality are considered valid information for investigation within a phenomenological study (Friedman & Schustack, 2012). Through the phenomenological approach, the researcher can gain knowledge not just about **what** a person is experiencing, but also about **how** a person experience things, with the aim of understanding and describing it (Liamputtong, 2013). It becomes therefore important to see the individual's experience from her/his own perspective, and suspend one's own prejudgments thereof in order to understand and properly describe the person's **living/lived** experience.

#### 3.2 Phenomenology: The meaning of lived experience

Phenomenology has its roots in philosophy and is defined in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy as:

the study of structures of experience, or consciousness ... the study of 'phenomena': appearance of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the way we experience things, thus the meaning things have in our experience ... conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view. (Smith, 2016, p. 1)

According to the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (Phenomenology, 2016), the word **phenomenology** is derived from the Greek word, which literally means "to show". From *phainein*, the word *phainemenon* was derived, which literally means "that which appears" (p. 1). According to Tudor and Hobbes (2010) phenomenology is "the view that we can best understand the world by direct personal experience" (p. 257). Our consciousness about these direct personal experiences becomes important to share with others. Our conscious experiences are unique in the way we experience, live or act upon them (Smith, 2016). The main aim of phenomenological research is to understand the phenomenon being studied (UH, 2017). To accomplish this, the

primary task of phenomenological research is to observe, describe, and analyse (Phenomenology, 2016a).

In conducting phenomenological analysis, the researcher is interested in the way a lived experience is experienced (Lindegger, 2006). In order to do this, the researcher should focus on **the phenomena themselves** as they are revealed, and not impose previously formulated theories onto them. In other words, let the phenomenon speak for itself and suspend own judgement. This is referred to as **bracketing**, which means acknowledging one's own biases and not allowing one's own perceptions and perspective to interfere, but rather to see it the way the participant sees it (Liamputtong, 2013; Wagner, Kawulich & Garner, 2012). Another important concept in phenomenology is that of **intentionality**, which refers to a person's intentional conscious act of directing her/his attention towards a certain phenomenon as it appears to or is perceived by her/him (Kruger, 1988; Kawulich & Holland, 2012). Viljoen (2013b) simply refers to intentionality as (human) **will**.

### **3.2.1 The phenomenological approach of this study**

There are various types of phenomenological approaches to study a phenomenon. In the current study, the type of phenomenological approach that is used is the hermeneutical phenomenology approach. As indicated by Smith (2016) this approach “studies interpretive structures of experience, how we understand and engage things around us in our human world, including ourselves and others” (p. 7). Hermeneutics within the term hermeneutical, refers to interpretation, and therefore also to the meaning of a text (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012). Hermeneutic phenomenology is the study of the interpretation of experiences and their meanings (Liamputtong, 2013). Rapport (2005) views hermeneutic phenomenology in relation to the interpretation of texts and regards ordinary language used in daily experiences to be important in revealing meaning. In the current study the researcher took the words and language research participants used into consideration as part of the interpretations and meanings of their experiences.

Initially, the intended approach was more descriptive in nature, suggesting a descriptive phenomenological approach, which is very popular. This approach has a strong link to philosophical phenomenology. It iterates the description of the conscious life-world experience of the individual and accentuates an intuitive understanding of the essences of experience (Todres, 2005). This approach can be summarised to describe a specific phenomenon and intuitively determine its essential or unchanging meaning. It is true, however, that definitions and boundaries between approaches can sometimes be blurred (Holloway & Todres, 2005).

The current researcher decided to retain some aspects of the descriptive phenomenological approach (i.e. describing the conscious lived experiences), but decided to mainly follow the hermeneutic phenomenology approach, which is to describe and understand the experiences of the research participants intuitively. The current researcher also wanted to interpret the experiences in respect of contributing towards living an improved quality of life. In order to accomplish this, contextual factors relating to the participants' experiences, as well as theoretical concepts from within the theoretical approach that was applied (i.e. the positive psychological approach) had to be considered.

The hermeneutic phenomenological approach allows one to find a deeper meaning in experience (Rapport, 2005). In order for the current researcher to find this deeper meaning, he needed to be able to interpret and have an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and their meanings and therefore needed to obtain detailed information. In the end, the current researcher was not just interested in knowing **what** participants experienced in their lived worlds, and **how** they experienced it, but also what it meant through their, as well as his own, interpretations thereof. More so, he wanted to know what it practically meant or implied to mean to participants in terms of their lives lived, in revealing to him how their experiences contributed to their quality of life experience.

### **3.2.2 Phenomenological analysis**

#### **3.2.2.1 Conscious lived experience**

When conducting phenomenological analysis the researcher has to remember that there is no clear separation between an individual and her/his world of experience. The experience happens within the lived world of the individual, which is not the same as the physical environment, but rather "the world of personal experience within which each person lives" (Lindegger, 2006, p. 463). A further characteristic of this world that the researcher needs to enter to understand an individual's personal experience is that this is the world the individual is conscious about. Consequently, in following the phenomenological analysis approach, we return to the phenomena themselves as they are revealed in consciousness and lived experience. Thus, the researcher would rather aspire to **access** the participant's conscious experience(s) and not her/his unconscious experience(s).

#### **3.2.2.2 Themes of meaning**

Phenomenological studies are "primarily open-ended, searching for the themes that express meaning in participants' lives, and typically relies on interview data" (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p.

271). The person describes her/his experience in a specific and unique way. In the current study, these descriptions were obtained through individual interviews, which were then transcribed and thereafter analysed. The current researcher's aim was to understand a participant's uniquely specific experience from her/his perspective, by analysing the texts, in this case the interview transcripts of the unique life-story-telling narratives regarding participants' movement from a low point to a high point. The identification of unique and common/shared themes would provide the researcher with the means to understand the research participants' experiences and allow the researcher to devise a theory/model on what people say, think, feel, do and/or believe to experience a change in their lives.

In order to elicit collected data and produce knowledge from it, a qualitative researcher makes use of coding, classification, interpretation and re-interpretation, and ultimately the dissemination of such information (Iphofen, 2005). Glesne (2011) is of the opinion that coding helps in answering the questions that comes to mind when looking at your data in an effort to make sense of it. To her, analysing participants' stories thematically involves looking for themes and patterns, seeing how stories connect to each other and identifying what is highlighted through the stories. This is made possible through the thematic analysis and coding process. Thematic analysis takes place to identify themes or patterns in the data that will help the researcher to understand the phenomenon under study (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). Firstly, broad categories or clusters of meaning will be found, from which sub-themes can be developed to lead to the identification of themes (Kawulich & Holland, 2012).

Liamputtong (2013) defines a theme as "[a] grouping of data emerging from the research and one to which the researcher gives a name" (p. 390). According to her codes are the labels that will help in identifying themes. Codes can also be referred to as indexes or categories (Glesne, 2011). Within the process of thematically analysing the data, units of analysis are identified (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). These units can be words, phrases, sentences, or multiple sentences, which will help the researcher to identify the topic, or subject being discussed (p. 231). These units are then labelled with codes – codes become categories, categories become sub-themes, which become themes.

According to Kawulich and Holland (2012), phenomenological analysis starts with the unique lived experience of a particular phenomenon of a single individual, and then continues towards the shared lived experiences of others. Thus, in the current research study, the researcher aimed to firstly identify and describe what the uniquely personal experiences was of each individual participant and then, secondly, to determine what experiences, as described in terms of the themes, research participants shared or had in common with each other. The exact same research question was asked to all participants, as it was assumed that they all experienced the same phenomenon, namely



moved from a low to a high point. The research study's primary purpose therefore was to identify and describe some shared and unique themes pertaining to the phenomenon under study to express the meaning of participants' experiences. This in turn would then allow the researcher to pose his own theory/model on what is required to move from a low to a high point in life.

### **3.2.3 Self-transcendence: An existential, phenomenological, humanistic, transpersonal, spiritual experience**

The term transcendence in self-transcendence has its roots in the combination of the Latin prefix *trans-* and the word *scandare*: the former meaning **beyond** and the latter **to climb** (Self-transcendence, n.d.). The literal meaning of self-transcendence would then be to climb beyond oneself. Verbs that can be associated with transcendence include surpassing, achieving, going beyond, and mastering. Self-transcendence, according to the English Oxford Living Dictionaries (Self-transcendence, 2017), is “[t]he overcoming of the limits of the individual self and its desires in spiritual contemplation and realization” (p.1) According to Garcia-Romeu (2010) it is a process of growth and moving **past one's boundaries of the self**. The concept of self-transcendence is generally associated with and understood within the mystical, religious, scientific, and psychological contexts (Self-transcendence, 2016). This concept, in terms of the religious-spiritual context, may be understood in terms of the individual (or self) transcending towards the Divine or towards being in contact with God, having, in ideal terms, higher (i.e. fuller, richer or closer) knowledge and understanding of God, demonstrating spiritual growth, and/or being or functioning at a higher state (Self-transcendence, 2016). We could deduct that the state of self-transcendence may have different meanings depending from which religious context and deity viewpoint it is regarded.

The psychological nature of self-transcendence is visible in the contributions made by existentialists, who emphasised the human being as a person becoming or developing, being idealistic and setting goals to rise above limitations and circumstances (Meyer et al., 2013). It was especially Frankl (1992) who addressed self-transcendence and rising above dismal circumstances through choice of free will and attitude. Frankl (1966) pointed out that self-transcendence is a specifically human characteristic. Frankl (2000) viewed self-transcendence as an innate desire to find meaning and fulfilment in life. Self-transcendence, in line with the phenomenological view, is “a constitutive characteristic of being human [and] it always points, and is directed to something other than itself” (Frankl, 1966, p. 97). Self-transcendence constitutes **fulfilment of meaning** instead of fulfilment of the self (Frankl, 1966). According to him meaning fulfilment or fulfilment of the self was the ultimate goal, not self-actualisation, To Frankl (cited in Shantall, 2013) meaning

fulfilment was a primary goal, rather than seeking pleasure and happiness. In terms of pleasure and happiness, Frankl (1966) said, “man does not care for pleasure and happiness as such, but rather for that which causes these effects, be it the fulfilment of a personal meaning, or the encounter with a human being” (p. 101). In a human being’s life, she/he is not “pushed by drives, but pulled by meaning”, which implies making a decision to fulfil it or not (p. 100).

The humanist Abraham Maslow also contributed in respect of self-transcendence. Maslow (1971) regarded transcendence as “the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature, and to the cosmos” (p. 269). It was only near the end of his life that Maslow (1969) amended his hierarchy of needs, by adding self-transcendence as a higher need above the need for self-actualisation. He stated: “[t]he fully developed (and very fortunate) human being, working under the best conditions tends to be motivated by values which transcend his self. They are not selfish anymore in the old sense of that term” (p. 4).

In the amendment of his hierarchy of needs, Maslow indicated the difference between the self-actualisation and self-transcendence levels (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). A person functioning on the self-actualisation level pursues fulfilment in terms of her/his personal potential, while a person functioning on the self-transcendence level pursues “a cause beyond the self” (p. 303). Causes may involve “service to others, devotion to an ideal (e.g., truth, art) or a cause (e.g., social justice, environmentalism, the pursuit of science, a religious faith), and/or a desire to be united with what is perceived as transcendent or divine” (Koltko-Rivera, 2006, p. 303). During the state of self-transcendence, peak experiences are achieved that transcends the ego. Characteristic of this state are feelings of intense joy, peace and well-being. Self-transcendence can be achieved by focusing on goals beyond the self, for instance altruism and spiritual awakening.

Frankl also emphasised the importance of viewing psychological phenomena in a context, for instance, considering the **reason** why a person needs to have pleasure, happiness and peak-experiences, such as the need for meaning fulfilment, i.e. seeking and discovering meaning (Frankl, 1966; Shantall, 2013). Frankl (1992; 2000) saw human beings as essentially spiritual beings. According to Wong (2016), Frankl attributed self-transcendence to the spiritual nature of human beings, while the concept of **will to meaning** to him represented “the deepest and universal human need to reach beyond oneself and serve something greater” (p. 3).

It seems therefore that the concept self-transcendence also has meaning within a psychological-spiritual context, which may be understood in terms of the individual (or **self**) transcending towards a more meaningful existence, in other words, growing as a person to gain higher, fuller or richer knowledge and understanding of her/himself, and/or being or functioning at a higher level. In respect of the aforementioned humanistic phenomenological viewpoint, it would mean that the state of self-transcendence may also have different meanings, depending on the specific goals or aspirations the individual has set before her/him and which cause she/he pursued beyond the self.

As indicated before, **transpersonal** suggests to transcend or move beyond oneself. In transpersonal psychology, self-transcendent or spiritual aspects are studied (Dängeli, 2017). Both religious-spiritual and personal psychological-spiritual experiences are included within this field of psychology. In spiritual or transpersonal psychology, transcendent and spiritual aspects of an individual's experience are integrated with modern psychological thought (Dängeli, 2017). The researcher therefore regarded the transpersonal (spiritual) psychological point of view, as the viewpoint from which the two meanings of self-transcendence could be understood and regarded in terms of spirituality pertaining to human experiences. In the current study, the religious-spiritual experiences formed part of the spiritual aspects investigated, while the psychological-spiritual experiences formed part of the psychological aspects.

One of the main reasons why self-transcendence was taken into consideration for this study, was because it could be viewed, in accordance with the definition provided in Shantall, 2013, as “the ability human beings have to think about themselves, to evaluate and judge themselves, and to **change** themselves” (p. 464). The current researcher was especially interested to determine what active and/or creative role the individual played in changing the low point experience into a high point experience, and therefore ultimately (if attainable) in changing her/his destiny.

### **3.3 Positive psychology: Overcoming negativity through positivity**

#### **3.3.1 Introduction**

Positive psychology is regarded as the science of optimal human functioning (Green, 2010) or “the scientific study of what makes life most worth living” (Peterson, 2008, p. 1). Martin Seligman is generally regarded as the father of positive psychology. As the president of the American Psychological Association in 1998, he introduced the concept as a theme. It gained more recognition through the first summit on positive psychology held in 1999, the first international conference on positive psychology held in 2002 and the first world congress held in 2009 (Pezzini, 2011).

The origin of the term positive psychology can be attributed to the writings of Abraham Maslow, but the origin of the need for a new approach in psychology to study “healthy-minded themes” and focussing on mind-cure, may go as far back as William James’ “*Energies of Men*” paper, presented as a presidential address before the American Philosophical Association at Columbia University in 1906 (James, 1907; Pawelski, 2003, p. 54; Pezzini, 2011). Maslow (1970) used it in reference to studying psychological health, but also in a sense of studying the **good** man [*or woman*] and the **happy** man [*or woman*]. Over the years positive psychology research contributed considerably to the field of psychology (Caza & Cameron, 2008).

Positive psychology has its roots in 20th century humanistic psychology, which concentrates on improving psychological health and well-being. Both approaches are also interested in the positive aspects pertaining to it. According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (cited in Caza & Cameron, 2008), it investigates what makes life worth living. According to humanists, previous psychological theories had limitations, such as the loss of meaning of lived experiences in measuring human behaviour individual; previous pessimistic views on human behaviour which focussed on the negative, and in general, not taking the individual subjective experience into account (Boundless.com, n.d., p. 4-5).

The humanistic concepts of uniqueness (i.e. viewing the person as a unique individual); conscious subjective experience (i.e. studying the person from her/his point of perception and understanding of the world); actualisation (i.e. both Roger’s actualising tendency and Maslow’s need for self-actualisation); holism (i.e. viewing the person as an integrated whole), happiness (i.e. being in a state of extreme or abundant gratification) and fulfilment (i.e. having a meaningful life) significantly contributed towards the establishment of a positive psychology approach in studying human behaviour (Friedman & Schustack, 2012; McLeod, 2015; Meyer et al., 2013).

### **3.3.2 Positive psychology concerns**

Issues that positive psychology is concerned with, include positive experiences, positive emotions, positive individual (psychological) traits, positive relationships and positive institutions (Peterson, 2006; Positive Psychology Centre, 2018). In the current study, positive experiences, positive emotions, positive individual (psychological) traits, and positive relationships will be discussed in more detail, along with a few other indicators of well-being and happiness.

### 3.3.2.1 Positive experiences

Some of the primary experiences that positive psychology concerns itself with are well-being, happiness, fulfilment, meaning, and religion/spirituality.

- **Well-being**

As indicated previously, positive psychology focuses on optimizing psychological well-being. Well-being (2018) can be defined as “a good or satisfactory condition of existence; a state characterized by health, happiness, and prosperity” (p. 1) or a “state of being comfortable” (Well-being, 2017, p. 1). Well-being is generally linked to quality of life, satisfaction in life, purpose, relationships and beliefs (Cooper & Leiter, 2017; Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, 2012). Traditionally, well-being was seen as either **hedonic** well-being, which is “the subjective experiences of pleasure and life satisfaction”, or **eudaimonic** well-being, which is about “meaning, purpose and engagement” (Diener as cited in Austin et al., 2013, p. 89). The hedonic tradition sees well-being in terms of maximizing the existence and presence of positive affect in one’s life and the minimizing or absence of negative affect (Vázquez, Hervás, Rahona & Gómez, 2009). From the eudaimonic point of view, well-being is seen as living to fulfilment and reaching one’s full potential. Drakopoulus (2013) suggests that life satisfaction, happiness and subjective well-being are closely related terms and uses it interchangeably. It is thereby noted that happiness and well-being are generally viewed as very closely related to each other.

Carol Ryff (1989) has identified six dimensions of psychological well-being, which are crucial to positive functioning and required for personal improvement and realising one’s potential. These dimensions are: **self-acceptance** (“holding positive attitudes towards oneself”); **positive relations with others** (having “warm, trusting interpersonal relations ... strong feelings of empathy and affection for all human beings ... achievement of close unions with others (intimacy) and the guidance and direction of others”); **autonomy** (“self-determination, independence, and the regulation of behaviour from within ... resistance to enculturation ... having an internal locus of evaluation”); **environmental mastery** (ability to “manipulate and control complex environments” and “advance in the world and change it creatively through physical or mental activities”, but also taking “advantage of environmental opportunities”); **purpose in life** (having “a clear comprehension of life’s purpose, a sense of directedness, and intentionality”, having “goals in life” and a “feeling that life is meaningful”); and **personal growth** (actualising oneself and “continue to develop one’s potential, to grow, and expand as a person”, showing “[o]penness to experience” to

ensure that “an individual is continually developing and becoming, rather than achieving a fixed state wherein all problems are solved”) (p. 1071).

- **Happiness**

From a positive psychology perspective, one of the fundamental aspects of having a positive experience, is that of experiencing happiness. Austin et al. (2013) regard happiness as a form of subjective or hedonic well-being, suggesting the subjective experiences of pleasure and life satisfaction. Maslow (1999) referred to peak experiences as “moments of highest happiness and fulfilment” (p. 85).

Veenhoven (cited in Drakopoulos, 2013) sees happiness as a positive evaluation of one’s general quality of life. Happiness is associated with positive emotions such as joy, contentment, interest, pride, excitement, satisfaction, pleasure, ecstasy, peace, comfort and warmth that contribute to well-being and positive outcomes (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Lyubomirsky et al., 2011; Seligman, 2011a; 2011b; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Happy people seem to frequently experience positive emotions, and infrequently, though not absent, negative emotions (Lyubomirsky, 2011).

Seligman (2002) views happiness as consisting of three dimensions or developing stages namely, the Pleasant Life, the Good Life, and the Meaningful Life. The Pleasant Life is characterised by having positive emotions about the present, past, and future. The Good Life is characterised by having unique virtues and strengths to enrich one’s life and to enable one to value and appreciate what one likes doing in life. Lastly, the Meaningful Life provides us with a deep sense of fulfilment by using our unique strengths for a greater purpose. Khoddam (2015) is of the opinion that happiness may be defined by a person in her/his own unique way.

- **Fulfilment**

As previously indicated, fulfilment is a concept which was strongly associated with the existential/humanistic approach to optimal human functioning and especially evident from Rogers’ actualising tendency (i.e. to reach one’s full potential), Maslow’s self-actualisation (i.e. to be fully functioning and have peak experiences), and Frankl’s spiritual direction (i.e. to live with a sense of purpose) (Maslow, 1999; Moore, 1988; 2013; Shantall, 2013; Vázquez et al., 2009). Friedman and Schustack (2012) point out that the humanistic approach

stresses the ‘being’ in human beings ... it emphasizes the special active and aware quality of human beings. Life develops as people create worlds for themselves. This

view also often moves from humans 'being' to humans 'becoming'; that is, the healthy personality exhibits an active movement toward self-fulfilment. (p. 290)

In terms of Frankl's (1966) view on meaning fulfilment and a sense of purpose to achieve life goals, fulfilment would then be coupled to self-transcendence. Similarly, Maslow's (1969; 1971) view on self-actualisation was also related to fulfilment of the self (or reaching full potential), which he later expanded to self-transcendence as a higher need; one of being fully developed or fulfilled.

From a positive psychological perspective, the term fulfilment has been used extensively. Fulfilment has been used by Seligman (2002) in his view on the dimensions of happiness in terms of the Meaningful Life, which is seen as an experience of fulfilment as a result of applying one's strengths to a greater **purpose** than oneself. From the eudaimonic well-being point of view, fulfilment or living to one's fullest potential is reached as a result of being fully actualised (Vázquez et al., 2009). Fulfilment, or optimal human functioning, has also been associated with life satisfaction, personal growth, flourishing, happiness, the good life, meaning and purpose in life and spiritual purpose (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Haworth & Hart, 2007; McLeod, 2015; Shantall, 2013; Seligman, 2002; 2011b). Ryff's model of well-being also suggests fulfilment through the dimensions of purpose in life (by having direction, intentional purpose, goals and meaning in life) and personal growth (by actualising oneself and continuous development and growth of one's potential (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keys, 1995; Vázquez et al., 2009).

In actualising one's full potential, a person is being fulfilled (Lopez et al., 2015). True fulfilment may also stem from using one's talents towards important accomplishments, engaging in altruistic acts or helping others and being spiritual (Friedman & Schustack, 2012). Whitbourne (2010) studied fulfilment across many years and different ages and found that it could be achieved at any age. She has identified certain pathways a person can follow during her/his lifetime, which could be either useful and positive or detrimental and negative to finding fulfilment.

We have seen therefore that fulfilment is closely related to well-being, being happy, having purpose and/or meaning in life and living to one's full potential. It was also indicated that fulfilment is linked to meaning fulfilment, which implies moving beyond oneself towards self-transcendence (Shantall, 2013, p. 453).

- **Meaning**

Positive psychology focuses on meaning in life. The existentialists and humanists introduced the concept of meaning in psychology. Meaning in life was regarded as unique to each person, and

finding meaning in life would stem from an internal drive to fulfil our human potential (Maslow, 1971; Taher, 2015). It is widely accepted that Frankl's existential theory strongly accentuates concepts such as a human being's will to meaning and meaning in life (Shantall, 2013). Meaning was a pertinent theme in his book, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Frankl, 1992). According to Shantall (2013), Frankl's understanding of meaning is "the opportunity, task or duty presented to and discerned by us through our conscience as something we are to realise or grasp in each and every unique situation of our own personal lives" (p. 439).

The will to meaning, according to Frankl (1992), is the primary motivating force in a human beings' life and is contrasted with the will to pleasure (Freud) and the will to power (Adler) – it can present itself through times of hardship, as well as in times of well-being (Shantall, 2013). Frankl (1992) accentuated that suffering is inevitable in life, but one should find meaning and purpose in it. Frankl (cited in Shantall, 2013) indicated three primary ways in which we can obtain meaning in life, namely through the creative things we do; the uplifting things we experience; and the type of attitude we have towards suffering. As previously indicated, the will to meaning is linked to meaning fulfilment and self-transcendence (Frankl, 1966).

Some of the various components of meaning include intentional directedness, coherency, emotional involvement, purpose in life, experience of flow, and needs fulfilment (Leontiev, 2015). Seligman (2011b) links fulfilment or being fulfilled in life with meaning and purpose (a Meaningful Life), while in Ryff's model of well-being, it is linked to purpose in life (or experiencing life as meaningful) and personal growth (which highlights actualising oneself and developing one's potential). Meaning implies serving or being part of something bigger than oneself and utilising one's unique strengths to reach a higher purpose and contributing towards a better world (Horne, 2009; Seligman, 2011a).

As stated previously, according to Austin et al. (2013) purpose and meaning is part of eudaimonic well-being, but also includes engagement. Engagement in positive psychology is also referred to as flow, which basically means being absorbed in an activity (Seligman, 2011a). Horne (2009) defines engagement as "immersing oneself in activities which involve high levels of absorption which involves challenge and require the use of skills and strengths; time passes quickly; we feel satisfied with our life if we have engaging activities" (p. 1). Engagement relates to activities, such as sport, work, education and relationships with others.

One's purpose in life can either be strong or weak, which will respectively indicate either meaning (associated with aims, objectives, goals and direction) or a lack of meaning (associated with having



only a few goals or aims and lack of directedness) (David, 2017). Meaning in life can also be linked to goal achievement – it is dependent on aspects such as having personal and meaningful goals (Haworth & Hart, 2007). Other aspects of having a meaningful life include having meaningful relationships with others and appreciating daily meaningful moments (Shantall, 2013). Wong (2014) suggests that meaning is essential to health, resilience, optimism and well-being.

By viewing meaning as a search for deeper meaning, reaching a higher purpose, connecting or engaging with something or someone else on a deeper level and/or reaching beyond one-self or self-transcending, especially in terms of the religious-spiritual sense of transcending towards God or the Divine deity, the spiritual dimension of being human becomes visible. Emmons (cited in Leontiev, 2015) typically categorizes personal life meaning dimensions or domains as the domains of achievement/work; relationships/intimacy; religion/spirituality; and self-transcendence/generativity. From this categorization, it can be seen that meaning not only encompasses the psychological dimension of being human, but also extends to the spiritual and religious dimensions. For the current study, the researcher had to expect that in reality, the experience of a deeper or higher meaning would exist on a deeper psychological, as well as religious/spiritual level and therefore it needed to be taken into consideration.

- **Religion/spirituality**

Religion, according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, can be defined as “the belief in the existence of a god [or God] or gods, and the activities that are connected with the worship of them” (Turnbull, 2010, p. 1244). Spirituality in turn, is defined as “the quality of being concerned with religion or the human spirit” (Turnbull, 2010, p. 1435). Religion and spirituality are distinct, yet in some ways, similar concepts. Drescher and colleagues (cited in Foy, Drescher & Watson, 2011) define religion as “a system of beliefs, values, rituals, and practices shared in common by a social community as a means of experiencing and connecting with the sacred or divine” (p. 91), while spirituality is seen as “an individual's understanding of, experience with, and connection to that which transcends the self” (p. 90). Both these definitions suggest actions pertaining to someone or some being or something outside the sphere of the individual self, although as we have seen, transcending the self also may still refer to the individual person her/himself.

Religious activities or practices include worship service attendance, participation in scripture study or prayer groups, participation in religious programs, private devotions (prayer, scripture reading outside religious services, meditation), sharing one's faith, spiritual experiences, and practices characteristic of a specific religion (Pew Research Centre, 2015). Religion has been shown to be

advantageous to the human experience. It was found that religion is helpful in coping with stress positively, boosts social support as a result of affiliation to religious organisations and attendance of religious functions, provides meaning to things otherwise seen as without meaning or purpose, and encourages healthy eating habits and sexual behaviour (Ciccarelli & White, 2017).

Other positive effects of religion on mental health include less depression symptoms and anxiety, suicide, delinquency, premature sexual involvement, and substance (drug and alcohol) abuse (Archer, 2017; Donahue & Benson, 1995; George, Larson, Koenig & McCullough, 2000). Studies also indicated positive associations between being religious and personal and emotional well-being; personal/emotional and social life satisfaction; hope; optimism; being connected and comforted after one has felt hopeless, unsupported and disconnected; meaning and purpose; self-esteem; happiness; prosocial values and behaviour, and marital satisfaction (Archer, 2017; Efklides & Moraitou, 2013; Foy et al., 2011; Lopez et al., 2015; Saroglou, 2013). Some correlational research studies also found that people with a religious belief live longer than those not believing in a divine being (Ciccarelli & White, 2017).

One of the major positive effects of religion is that it helps people make sense of death (or loss) and to understand it (James & Gilliland, 2013). Religion is a key factor in dealing with loss of others or loved ones, as well as one's own death. A majority of people find comfort in faith and religion during crisis as a means of coping and to grow and recover. The advantages of faith, belief and religious activities or practices include offering comfort, hope and support (James & Gilliland, 2013). People find healing in their faith and spirituality.

The distinction made between religion and spirituality is generally regarded in respect of religious and spiritual awareness. According to Scharmer (cited in Saxena, Scharmer & Goldman Schuyler, 2014) the difference between spiritual and religious awareness is that the latter "usually brings the belief systems and dogmas of a particular religion", while the former "focuses experientially on the degree that you connect to the sources of your own self, your own humanity, your own energy, your own creativity" (p. 27). In a QOL study by Matheis et al. (2006) two distinctions of spirituality were made, namely existential spirituality (i.e. a worldview held by the person concerning their life's purpose, meaning and value) and religious spirituality (i.e. a relationship between the person and God/higher power). In this current study, the researcher also held this viewpoint of distinguishing between the two forms of spirituality.

Human beings play an active role in moving towards self-fulfilment (Friedman & Schustack, 2012). According to Shantall (2013), existentialists see humans as essentially spiritual beings. To live

purposefully and meaningful one needs to have spiritual direction. In the spiritual sense of Frankl's theory (cited in Shantall, 2013), one needs to "transcend [a life of] mere existence" (p. 439). Friedman and Schustack (2012) point out that humanism is a philosophical movement that focuses on the human spirit and spiritual aspects of human nature, which regards a human not just as "being" (in accordance to existentialism), but also as "becoming" (i.e. the ability to "create worlds for themselves" and "an active movement toward self-fulfilment") (p. 290).

The humanistic approach in viewing a human being underlines personal worth and human values (Friedman & Schustack, 2012). Part of a person being a spiritual being means having a (spiritual) purpose in life (Shantall, 2013). A person can therefore transcend beyond the existence of animals. Self-transcendence implies to rise above one's circumstances, thinking you can do something about them. Foy et al. (2011) is of the opinion that people's religious and spiritual experiences may be seen as part of a so-called "spiritual journey" over a prolonged lifetime. This journey may entail a "lifelong quest for meaning and direction" (p. 91), therefore one should be careful to rely only on data obtained from a cross-sectional study. A person's religious and spiritual experience could be richer than anticipated and should be regarded as multidimensional.

Various QOL researchers in the past have studied various spiritual concepts such as spirituality, religiousness, beliefs, purpose of life, faith, forgiveness and hope (Albers et al., 2010; Krägeloh et al., 2015; Land et al., 2012; O'Connell & Skevington, 2010). These studies indicated for example that spirituality and religiousness is related to subjective QOL; that a person's spiritual or religious life (consisting of e.g. beliefs or practices) which may indicate purpose or meaning in life, forms part of her/his overall QOL; that how a person experiences her/his spiritual life domain, affects her/his satisfaction with life in general; and that spiritual, religious, and personal beliefs form an important part of QOL assessment. In the current study, religion and spirituality were both regarded as part of the spiritual aspects under investigation. The current researcher would consider the spiritual aspects to include the two dimensions mentioned earlier namely, the existential nature of spirituality (i.e. **existential spirituality** – including self-transcendence) and the religious nature of spirituality (i.e. **religious spirituality**).

### **3.3.2.2 Positive emotions**

As previously noted, well-being, especially hedonic well-being, as well as happiness are associated with positive effect and therefore positive emotions (Austin et al., 2013; Lyubomirsky, 2011; Vázquez et al., 2009). Positive psychology focuses on positive emotions, which concerns "being content with one's past, being happy in the present, and having hope for the future" (Chaudhary,

Jyoti & Chaudhary, 2014, p. 528). The Pleasant Life is characterised by having positive emotions about the present, past, and future (Seligman, 2002).

Positive emotions have been associated with happiness, life satisfaction, absence or relative absence of negative affect and optimism (Austin et al., 2013; Lyubomirsky et al., 2011; MacLeod, 2013; Rajaei, Khoyneshad, Javanmard, & Abdollahpour, 2016). Seligman (2002) identified three kinds of happiness, each associated with positive emotion, namely, “pleasure and gratification”; “strength and virtue”; and “meaning and purpose” (p. xii). According to him, happiness progresses from the first to the third kind. Positive emotions frequently experienced by happy people include joy, interest and pride, while they infrequently experience negative emotions that include being sad, anxious or angry. Happiness can be seen as essentially experiencing positive emotions most of the time or the presence of **frequent positive affect**. Positive affect includes positive moods (Lyubomirsky et al., 2011). To be presently happy means to have dealt effectively with negative emotions of the past (Pursuitofhappiness.org, 2016).

There are various other advantages of having positive emotions or high positive affect. These include helping people with behaviour towards others, participating (and continue participating) in activities, being involved with their environment, and adapting in general (Fredrickson, 2001). Essentially, happier people do not express their negative emotions quite so often, but have various strategies available to coping with the stress of daily life (Pursuitofhappiness.org, 2016). Positive emotions, along with personal resilience, are important to optimal functioning (Fredrickson, 2001; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004).

Positive emotions play an important role in human flourishing. Flourishing is an indication of a person functioning at an optimal level (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Seligman’s book (cited in Amazon, 2017), *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being* is about new thinking on the positive psychological concept of well-being and addresses cultivating one’s talents, having meaningful lasting relationships with others, being pleased, and contributing purposefully to the world. According to the first element of the PERMA model, **positive emotion** is required to flourish. These positive emotions include a wide variety of emotions such as pleasure, gratification, satisfaction, ecstasy, excitement, warmth, comfort and admiration, and not just being happy and joyful (Seligman, 2011a; 2011b). Fredrickson (2001) regards our human ability to experience positive emotions as an essential strength and very important to flourish. According to her “[p]ositive emotions ... produce flourishing” (p. 218).

Positive emotions are associated with positive life circumstances, such as being healthier, living longer and having better social relationships, and generally being more successful (Lyubomirsky et al., 2011). According to Mauss et al. (2011), positive emotions are linked to improved psychological functioning and well-being and fewer mental health problems. Rajaei et al. (2016) pointed out that happiness is related to lower levels of physical, anxiety and depressive symptoms, which relate to social dysfunction. Positive mood or emotions encourage people to broaden and build new personal and social resources, expand on their skills, set (new) goals and work more actively toward them (Lyubomirsky et al., 2011).

Positive psychology recognises negative emotions and outcomes (Lewis, 2011). Negative emotions or outcomes may, however, be useful in serving a positive purpose (Lyubomirsky et al., 2011). For example, negative emotions such as fear, anger, sadness, anxiety, or stress can guard us against threats to our well-being, as it enables us to do something about them (Lewis, 2011). Kuppens, Realo and Diener (2008) found a stronger positive relation between experiencing positive emotions and life satisfaction than between the absence of negative emotions and life satisfaction. This relation, however, was moderated by type of culture and values, specifically, in respect of emphasis on self-expression versus survival, of the society one belongs and adheres to. In individualistic cultures, negative emotional experiences were more negatively related to life satisfaction than in collectivistic cultures, while positive emotional experiences were more positively related with life satisfaction within cultures where self-expression rather than survival is emphasised as values (Kuppens et al., 2008).

Emotion is influenced by religion in various ways. According to Silberman (cited in Emmons & McNamara, 2006):

religion encourages appropriate and inappropriate emotions and there level of intensity (e.g. love God with all of your heart); ... beliefs about the nature and attributes of God may give rise to specific emotions as well as influence overall emotional well-being (e.g. a positive effect of believing in a loving God versus the negative effect of believing in a 'punitive vengeful' God); ... religion offers the opportunity to experience a uniquely powerful emotional experience of closeness to the sacred. (p. 12)

Through the years, many emotions have been associated with religion. Such emotions include love, joy, hope, fear, respect, hatred, desire, remorse, sorrow, gratitude, compassion, zeal, humbleness, gratefulness, awe and happiness (Emmons & McNamara, 2006). Emotions normally associated with religion are called sacred emotions (Emmons, 2005). Sacred emotions occur more likely in

**religious settings**, such as churches, synagogues and mosques, than in nonreligious settings, although it can be experienced here. Furthermore, sacred emotions are more prone to be revealed through **spiritual/religious** activities or **practices**, such as worship, prayer and meditation, than nonreligious practices, although they could be activated by them. They are more likely to be experienced by people “who self-identify as religious or spiritual (or both) than by people who do not think of themselves as either spiritual or religious”, although they could be felt by such people occasionally (Emmons, 2005, p. 13). Emotions, and specifically sacred emotions, have had positive effects on human functioning and well-being throughout history.

In the current study, the role of positive emotions as it emerged would be considered in terms of their effect on positive functioning. The focus would be on managing negative emotions effectively, being passionately moved by emotions, as well as how emotions relate to spiritual experience.

### **3.3.2.3 Positive (enduring) psychological traits: Strengths and virtues**

The focus of positive psychology also includes focusing on positive and enduring individual traits, which concerns the strengths and virtues of individuals. Peterson and Seligman (2004) developed a *Character Strengths and Virtues* (CSV) handbook to represent identified and classified positive psychological traits of human beings. The handbook provided a theoretical and a classification framework to understand and discuss positive traits (strengths and virtues) in people. It also has practical applications for positive psychology (VIA Institute on Character, 2018a). One of these practical applications is to measure positive psychology’s effectiveness through a universal classification system (Pursuitofhappiness.org, 2016).

It seems that a **good character** is universal, enduring and beneficial to ourselves and others. Positive psychology concerns itself with the character strengths or virtues to show a good strong character and how to build it (Niemi, 2010). These virtues or traits are culturally determined and differ in the way societies assign values and norms to them. Human strength can be viewed as consisting of good character or having strength of character. Peterson and Seligman (2004) studied various texts across the world and found six universal or core virtues valued in nearly every culture and, according to them, determined a good character, which were steadily linked to enduring happiness. They further identified twenty-four strengths or moral traits that can be learned and developed to lead to virtues. Using and developing strengths and virtues leads to gratification and authentic happiness and ultimately a meaningful life. Characteristics of character strengths are: stability over time, valued in their own right, universally recognised and can be instilled in children by parents or provided through role models.

The virtues and strengths are summarised, according to the classification of Peterson and Seligman (2004), as follows:

- Wisdom and knowledge – Creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, and perspective.
- Courage – Authenticity, bravery, persistence, and zest.
- Humanity – Kindness, love, kindness, and social intelligence.
- Justice – Fairness, leadership, and teamwork.
- Temperance – Forgiveness, modesty, prudence, and self-regulation.
- Transcendence – Appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humour, and religiousness.

Various studies to date have shown that positive relationships exist between the application of strengths and virtues and psychological and physical wellbeing, as well as life satisfaction (Gander, Proyer, Ruch, & Wyss, 2012; Proctor, Maltby, & Linley, 2010; Proctor et al., 2011). Studies have been conducted in various fields, such as education, health, work place and sport, investigating various strengths, some not included in the CSV handbook, such as personal skills (not job specific, e.g. music, sports), character, social intelligence, kindness, gratitude, love, hope, zest, job skills, intelligence/education, competitive, efficacy, esteem-builder, judgement, planful, service, resilience, and work ethic (Gallup, 2018; Gander et al., 2012; Linley & Stoker, 2012; Park & Peterson, 2009; Proctor et al., 2010; Proctor et al., 2011; Tweed, Biswas-Diener, & Lehman, 2012; Yeager, 2007).

Linley and Stoker (2012) developed a measuring tool, the Realise2, to determine an individual's strengths from sixty different strengths, while the StrengthsFinder 2.0 (now Clifton StrengthsFinder 2.0) developed by Rath (2007) identifies thirty-four strengths (Francis, 2016; Gallup, 2018; Linley & Stoker, 2012; Rath, 2007; Tweed et al., 2012). Even before the CSV handbook, In his article, *Building Human Strength: Psychology's Forgotten Mission*, Seligman (1998) mentioned certain human strengths that guard humans against mental illness, such as resilience, courage, optimism, interpersonal skill, work ethic, hope, honesty and perseverance.

The current study proposes that certain character strengths, which are not necessarily universal or culture specific, are important to consider, as they contributed significantly to well-being, life-

satisfaction, meaning and self-transcendence in the study participants' lives. The twenty-four character strengths as identified by Peterson and Seligman were previously seen as personal traits (Peterson, 2006). These signature strengths may not be set in stone but can change over time as new research evidence surface. Peterson (2006) pointed out that other strengths or positive traits could be required to study people, and he indicated openness towards the possibility of future revisions and/or expansions thereof.

Various character strengths or traits have been recognised in the field of positive psychology. The current researcher decided to follow an independent approach to character strengths and virtues. Strengths were seen as those more prominent and prevailing traits that research participants had revealed through the themes in order to show character in moving from the low to the high point. Virtues were seen as emerging strengths, which had a religious/spiritual connotation to them. In a qualitative phenomenological study, strengths would be defined as seen through the participant's viewpoint. Some of the virtues and strengths considered in this literature review were included in the CSV, while some were not. A few of them will now be discussed.

- **Strengths**

- (1) Motivation**

According to Grieve, Van Deventer and Mojapelo-Batka (2008), motivated behaviour can be seen as a process of a “sequence of related actions, that are initiated and guided by a combination of instincts, drives, and rational conceptions”, which “flows from one situation to the next” (p. 179). It involves an individual purposefully deciding what she/he is going to do next. Thereby, motivation is a process of behaviour, which consists of goal-orientated decision-making through the interlinking of various sources of motivation to act in a certain way during one's normal existing life (Grieve et al., 2008). One acts in accordance to one's preferred needs as lived and experienced within a certain context or situation. From the humanistic point of view, and in accordance with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, which illustrates the manner in which a person actualises her-/himself (i.e. realising full potential), motivation results from the existence of an inherent self-actualisation need which one strives to satisfy.

Motivation can be seen as either extrinsic or intrinsic (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivation means a person performs a task or action mainly for an external reward or profitable result outside the person, or to avoid punishment, for instance, receiving a medal or bonus. Intrinsic motivation means performing a task or activity because it will lead to being rewarded (internally), for instance, doing something for excitement, fun or enjoyment (Cherry, 2017; Ciccarelli & White, 2017).



The self-determination theory of Deci and Ryan (1985) is a theory of motivation, which is expressed in terms of basic needs. These basic needs are competence, autonomy and relatedness, which are universal and inborn needs. A person's well-being is linked to satisfying these basic needs. Competence is to "[s]eek to control the outcome and experience mastery; autonomy is "the universal urge to be causal agents of one's one life and act in harmony with one's integrated self"; and relatedness is "the universal want to interact, be connected to, and experience caring for others" (MacLeod, 2013, p. 1). According to self-determination theory, a person will function and grow optimally if these universal needs are satisfied. From the humanistic point of view, optimal human functioning entails actualisation and fulfilment of the inner human potential that include striving towards meaning, purpose and excellence (Moore, 2013). Vázquez et al. (2009) argues that, according to self-determination theory, establishing and realising one's personal goals can lead to eudaimonic well-being, especially if the motivation for such goals is intrinsic rather than extrinsic.

Drive-reduction theory also suggests that people have needs that need to be fulfilled. Tension and arousal emanate from these needs and in satisfying the needs, tension can be released. This tension is referred to as drive, which, according to the theory, is unpleasant, but when the tension is reduced, subsequent pleasantness is experienced (Ciccarelli & White, 2017). The three basic needs, competence, autonomy and relatedness, also form part of Carol Ryff's categories or elements of psychological well-being, which are central to positive functioning and required for personal improvement and realising a person's potential. (David, 2017; Ryff, 1989; Sze, 2017).

In reference to self-actualisation, Maslow (1970) was of the opinion that a person with autonomy functions relatively independently of the environment and that development and growth are independent of external reward, but rather dependent on internal potential. Human beings are self-determining in spite of the influence of environmental factors. Maslow's (1971) hierarchy of needs-fulfilment has long been used to indicate how human beings are motivated to firstly satisfy their basic needs (i.e. physical and security needs), before satisfying higher needs (i.e. self-actualisation and transcendence needs). As the ultimate or highest need, Maslow (1971) proposed being motivated to satisfy the transcendence needs, which is judged as finding spiritual meaning beyond oneself. In Frankl's (1966) theory, people are basically motivated by the will to find meaning in their lives. Optimally developed people will thereby be functioning according to a self-determining action principle (Shantall, 2013). This principle means people do not act due to either forces or pressures from the inside (i.e. drives and needs) or the outside (i.e. circumstances), but rather "continuously take a stand concerning themselves and their circumstances and freely decide what

they should do and how they are to act” (p. 452). The will to meaning is a human being’s strongest motivation (Frankl, 1969).

## **(2) Self-awareness, consciousness and mindfulness**

Self-awareness can be defined as “conscious knowledge of one’s own character feelings, motives, and desires” (Self-awareness, 2017, p. 1). A popular definition of self-awareness has been provided by the psychologist Daniel Goleman (1995) in his book *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, which is “knowing one’s internal states, preference, resources and intuitions” which pertains to the inner thoughts and emotions, and involves “[r]ecognising one’s emotions ... [k]nowing one’s strengths and limits ... [a] strong sense of one’s self-worth and capabilities” (p. 26).

The concept of awareness in psychology go as far back as the studies conducted by Wilhelm Wundt (cited in Ciccarelli & White, 2017) in respect of attention to and conscious thoughts about the external environment or events, called objective introspection (p. 25). Awareness and consciousness can be used interchangeably (Ciccarelli & White, 2017). What self-awareness then would imply is the state of being aware or conscious of (internal) events of the self (Goleman, 1995). Since the expansion of humanistic theory, the **self** has become more and more apparent, as is evident from theories on personality, self-actualisation, the self-concept, self-transcendence, and self as part of a spiritual dimension. (Ciccarelli & White, 2017; Friedman & Schustack, 2012, Moore, 1988; 2013; Shantall, 2013; Train et al., 2009). Two other concepts regarding oneself is mentioned by Raffo (2014) namely, self-reflection or thinking intentionally about oneself to make sense or obtain insight, and **mindfulness** which is “a state of being, with intentional awareness of self, others and one’s surroundings” (p. 181).

According to Frankl’s (cited in Shantall, 2013) holistic approach to human functioning, proposing human existence in three dimensions (i.e. physically, psychologically and spiritually), people experience their bodies, they think about themselves, and they analyse their own motives and actions. The ability of self-awareness allows one to be present within every experience and what one does. Self-awareness and consciousness from a post-modernistic viewpoint in psychology allows one to be self-reflective, meaning to think about one’s own life experiences, beliefs and values and how they are influenced and understood (Train et al., 2009). According to Maslow (cited in Moore, 2013), one of the reasons why people sometimes do not reach self-actualisation, may be due to the lack of self-knowledge and insight, such as not being aware of their own needs.

Kabat-Zinn (cited in Dwyer, Gigliotti & Lee, 2014) defines mindfulness as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment and nonjudgmentally to the

unfolding of experience moment by moment” (pp. 131-132). Mindfulness therefore involves openness, acceptance, non-judgment, and compassion. Mindfulness also entails our ability to be aware of ourselves, our feelings, thoughts and senses (Train et al., 2009). Practicing and developing mindfulness is advantageous, as one can have deeper insight into and understanding of oneself, as well as understanding of others (Dwyer et al., 2014).

Minding relationships or mindfulness in relationships can be a crucial pre-requisite for flourishing relationships, or positive relationships that grow continuously (Chambers & Ulbrick, 2016). Minding refers a shared knowing process involving “the nonstop, interrelated thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of persons in a relationship” (Harvey et al. cited in Lopez et al., 2015, p. 340). Harvey and colleagues have identified a 5-component model of minding relationships to contribute towards positive relationships. These components are: knowing and being known; making relationship-enhancing attributions for behaviours; accepting and respecting; maintaining reciprocity (or mutuality); and continuity in minding. Two factors highlighted by Lopez et al. (2015) in support of building positive relationships are creating a culture of appreciation in relationships and capitalising on positive events. Seligman (2002) suggests using mindfulness as one of the ways to increase happiness in the present.

Mindfulness could correspond to the *Ubuntu* principle, a Zulu word that implies “a person is only a person because of other people” (Boon cited in Viljoen, 2013a, p. 544). According to Bartley (2012) and Kantor (2014) it *Ubuntu* an indication of being interconnected with other people (i.e. community) and having shared experiences of suffering and being human, and therefore it guides us in our relationships and interactions with others. Boon (cited in Viljoen, 2013a) describes *Ubuntu* with words such as morality, humaneness, compassion, care, understanding, empathy, sharing, hospitality, honesty and humility.

From the humanistic perspective of focussing on the being in human beings, our interconnectivity seems possible through adopting the existential idea that our existence (or being) is also in relation to other human beings (Friedman & Schustack, 2012; Murdock, 2013). By being mindful of others, being human, and supporting them can lead to self-fulfilment and having existential meaning, purpose and the desire to help others, often even in spite of dire circumstances.

### **(3) Self-transcendence**

As previously indicated, self-transcendence is related to transpersonal psychology and it emerged as a unique humanistic psychological concept. This concept is also part of positive psychology. According to Peterson and Seligman’s (2004) virtues and strengths categorisation, transcendence is

a universal virtue explained as those strengths that connect us to the bigger universe (or life) and it concerns meaning. The strengths it consists of include appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humour, and spirituality. Self-transcendence implies moving beyond oneself; it taps into the spiritual dimension of being human. This can be religious-spiritually (having faith in God/the deity) or existential-spiritually (optimal functioning with meaning fulfilment). Transcendence includes finding “spiritual meaning beyond one’s immediate self” (Ciccarelli & White, 2017, p. 396). The highest point of Maslow’s (adapted) hierarchy can be viewed as the experience of a higher or transcendental state of consciousness that unifies one with the world and other beings (Train et al., 2009).

To function optimally, a mature person will not just focus on the self, but will move beyond this towards self-transcendence (Moore, 2013). This entails also having meaningful intimate and fruitful relationships with others in the world. Friedman and Schustack (2012) also stress the importance of our relations with other human beings. According to them, a mature person actively moves towards self-fulfilment and they state that “life develops as people create worlds for themselves” (p. 290). According to Frankl (cited in Shantall, 2013), healthy and mature people’s primary goals are not their own satisfaction and happiness, but rather their striving to fulfil life’s meaningful goals.

#### **(4) Optimism**

Optimism is the “feeling that good things will happen and that something will be successful” (Turnbull, 2010, p. 1033), or “[h]opefulness and confidence about the future” (Optimism, 2017, p. 1). In short, it can be seen as “general positive expectancy” (Lyubomirsky et al., 2011, p. 96). Optimists tend to look for positive outcomes regularly, while pessimists have the tendency to expect the worst to happen (Ciccarelli & White, 2017). The word optimism is derived from the Latin word *optimum*, which means, “the best or most favourable point, degree, amount ... the greatest degree or best result obtained under specific conditions” (Optimum, 2018, p. 1). This would therefore imply that an optimist expects the best outcome within a certain situation. On the other hand, a pessimist tends to focus on the negative within in a situation (Friedman & Schustack, 2012). It is recommended that a fine balance between optimism and pessimism is maintained, but, leaning moderately toward optimism, seems to be the most advantageous (Hecht, 2013; Lopez et al., 2015).

Literature widely recognises the relation between optimism and higher levels of physical and health (Efklides & Moraitou, 2013; Hecht, 2013; Lyubomirsky et al., 2011). Studies cited in Lyubomirsky et al. (2011) indicate optimism to be related to a higher level of self-reported vitality. Associations between optimism and increased life and immune-system functioning, as well as increased antivirus

and anticancer cells in the body have been found (Ciccarelli & White, 2017). Studies by Barlow and Durand (2002) further found that optimistic patients were less depressed than pessimistic patients, they were happier and more relieved after operations and reported higher levels of quality of life six months afterwards. Higher death rates as well as higher levels of physical and emotional health problems have been found amongst pessimists compared to optimists (Ciccarelli & White, 2017). Pessimists were also less socially active and had lower levels of energy than optimists.

Optimism has been associated with coping skills and some people, interestingly enough, use humour instead of denial to cope with stress (Lyubomirsky et al., 2011). Amongst college students, optimism corresponds with significantly lowered general distress compared to pessimistic students (Barlow & Durand, 2002). Optimists seem to be able to control their moods and emotional reactions to situations (Ciccarelli & White, 2017). Pessimists, on the other hand, may be more depressed due to their negative thinking patterns (Marano, 2001). Becoming more optimistic involves monitoring one's own thoughts and being able to distinguish between optimistic and pessimistic thoughts in order to control one's negative thoughts (Ciccarelli & White, 2017). People with an optimistic perspective may see neutral events as positive and even see the positive in negative situations (Friedman & Schustack, 2012).

Optimism was furthermore found to be positively related with health, well-being, life satisfaction and happiness (Alarcon, Bowling & Khazon, 2013). According to Efklides and Moraitou (2013), optimists have better mental health and therefore enjoy increased levels of well-being. According to Wong (2014), meaning is essential to optimism. There is also a link between optimism and spirituality. Studies revealed that religious practices, faith and spirituality are predictive factors of hope and optimism (Lopez et al., 2015). Environmental factors, such as family environment, can influence optimism as well as pessimism (Bates, 2015). According to the study conducted by Bates (2015), the family-environment can either increase (or lower) optimism and lower (or increase) pessimism.

## **(5) Resilience**

It has already been indicated that optimal functioning is advanced by having positive emotions and personal resilience (Haworth & Hart, 2007). Being resilient means being able to adapt to adversity (Efklides & Moraitou, 2013). Resilience is defined as “the ability of people ... to feel better quickly after something unpleasant, such as shock, injury” (Turnbull, 2010, p. 1256). According to Yates, Tyrell and Masten (2015), resilience might be understood as “competence despite exposure to adversity” (p. 773). Individuals react differently to stressful situations, but some individuals are

more resilient than others. Resilience means to maintain, or even improve, your mental health even when stress is present, or to endure stressful situations to retain, remain or regain normal functioning (Foy et al., 2011; Troy & Mauss, 2011). Resilience is therefore demonstrated when an individual adapts favourably and effectively to stressful or adverse challenges.

Strengths and virtues are essential in helping one build resilience (Boe, 2015). Resilience is not fixed – it is viewed as dynamic and is displayed differently through the development stages. It furthermore strongly depends on the context within which the person finds her/himself (Foy et al., 2011). Especially for children, exhibiting and sustaining resilience depends on how much support is received from adults in their environments. Factors that contribute to assist people to overcome adversity and be resilient include positive personal, family, and environmental/psychosocial factors (Efklides & Moraitou, 2013).

Personality, and specifically the hardy personality, affects how a person manages and copes with stress (Grieve et al., 2008). Hardiness (or resilience) is found in people who are personally committed to themselves and exercise control over their lives (Grieve et al., 2008). They regard life as challenging rather than threatening or filled with problems. People with a hardy personality have also been shown to be extremely resistant to stress. Various correlational studies were performed to study resilience. For instance, resilience and optimism were found to be positively correlated (Lopez et al., 2015). Hardiness (or resilience) and sense of coherence are also correlated with happiness and positive affect (Lyubomirsky et al., 2011). A post 9/11 study indicated that less experiences of depression were found amongst resilient people (Lyubomirsky et al., 2011).

Meaning is also essential to resilience (Wong, 2014). Certain religious/spiritual factors, such as morality, self-control, forgiveness, and hope are associated with resilience (Foy et al., 2011).

## **(6) Coping**

Coping is “any positive effort made to prevent, manage or eliminate stressors so as to minimise their effects from becoming psychologically or physiologically hurtful or damaging” (Train et al., 2009, p. 382). The term coping therefore refers to dealing with stress following on a stressor. Coping with stress is a process whereby a person tries to tolerate stressors and overcome or reduce her/his problems in life. This may involve conscious mental effort and energy. Stressors can include adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or any significant sources of stress (APA cited in Foy et al., 2011). According to Train et al. (2009) people may react to stress in two ways namely, physiologically (reactions happening in the body) and psychologically (reactions happening in the mind). An important factor to keep in mind is that how one responds to stress depends on how the

stress is perceived or appraised by the individual. Behavioural reactions to a stressful event depend on the level of stress experienced.

Certain factors are considered important when managing stress, namely level of motivation, effectively recognising and dealing with emotions experienced during stress, effectively expressing emotions during stressful situations, quality of interpersonal relationships and effective communication, co-operative support, and maintaining one's own self (Grieve et al., 2008). Emotional, cognitive and behavioural factors influence reactions to stressful situations (Train et al., 2009), while personality may affect a person's ability to cope with everyday stress (Grieve et al., 2008). The ability to regulate emotions is considered an important factor when dealing with highly emotional and stressful situations (Troy & Mauss, 2011). In spite of a stressful situation being experienced as unpleasant, sometimes such an unpleasant feeling may enhance performance. It seems that in coping with intense negative emotional experiences, one needs to find a balance between varying emotions (Lopez et al. 2015).

Various studies on coping have been conducted. Some found positive relations with other positive traits and/or psychological states, such as optimism, relaxation, positive mood, happiness, goal, forgiveness and conscience (Rajaei et al., 2016). Stress can either have a positive effect or a negative effect on motivation (Grieve et al., 2008) and stress is perceived more positively by highly motivated people. From a humanistic viewpoint, when a person fails to fulfil her/his potential in accordance with Maslow's theory, it could cause distress. The distress of seeing oneself or being seen by others as a failure could lead to severe stress or even psychological disorder. Suitable therapeutic intervention could then allow the person to find solutions to or cope with her/his problems effectively and free the person from the influence of others who caused the person to experience such distress (Grieve et al., 2008).

Having lost someone can have a devastating effect on one's emotions, behaviours, identity, relationships and beliefs (Winch, 2014). Loss, in this regard, refers basically to death, but it may also include divorce, end of a relationship (e.g. separation), loss of a job, loss of a home and/or possessions, relocating and geographical change (moving away from friends, family or school), loss of health (e.g. physical and mental chronic disease, being paralysed or becoming disabled) or loss of anything important (James & Gilliland, 2013). Counselling can provide an effective way of dealing with loss. Divorce may also be perceived as very stressful and could have a very negative impact on a person; it is associated with an increased risk for prolonged psychological, educational/academic and social problems (D'Onofrio, 2011).

During a crisis, many people find comfort in faith and religion as a means for coping, recovery, and growth (James & Gilliland, 2013). Religion can help people to make sense of life and death. Positive relations have been indicated between being religious and being able to cope with high stress levels, adjusting better to losses, and being healthy and living longer (Santrock, 2011). According to James and Gilliland (2013) “faith, beliefs, and religious practices ... offer ... comfort, hope, support, and connection when one feels hopeless, unsupported, and disconnected” (p. 419). Individuals differ however when it comes to the importance of religion in their lives (Santrock, 2011). People should be allowed to use their faith and spirituality to find healing (James & Gilliland, 2013).

#### **(7) Goal-directedness (Future plans)**

A goal is defined as “attaining a specific standard of proficiency on a task” (Locke et al. cited in Gould, 2006, p. 241). Goals are future-orientated – it is something we strive for to achieve, and involves reaching an end point (MacLeod, 2013). Goal-directedness involves certain activities, such as planning for, performing or progress of and achieving one’s goals (Gould, 2006). According to Meyers (cited in Santrock, 2011) people change their circumstances and/or environment through their choices and goals.

Goals and motivation are closely linked. According to Massey University (2016), goals provide the direction to perform and motivation the energy to perform. To be truly motivated requires behaviour, which consists of goal-orientated decision-making (Grieve et al., 2008). Goals show one’s intention to act in a certain way, but having a plan will assist in making this happen, Plans ensure that goal-directed behaviour (and progress) is more likely to occur (MacLeod, 2013). There are various types of goals, such as long and short-term goals; general and specific goals, process, performance and outcome goals (Gould, 2006; Massey University, 2016).

MacLeod (2013) examined the relationship between goals and well-being, and indicated that having goals can be advantageous to a person, especially if one feels progress towards achieving a goal is being made and a sense of possible achievement is being experienced. Csikszentmihalyi (cited in Lopez et al., 2015) suggested that people are very happy when they experience flow (or absorption in an activity) on a daily basis. Flow supports the idea that by being busy with the activity in order to reach a goal and satisfy a need produces happiness (Lopez et al., 2015).

It was generally accepted in older psychological theories that reaching your goals would result in satisfaction and therefore happiness. Having and striving for goals in life is linked to purpose in life according to Carol Ryff’s (1989) dimension of psychological well-being, and also to meaning and



fulfilment according to the Seligman's (2002) PERMA-model pillar of meaning and purpose. It is clear that goals are important for well-being, to flourish, be fulfilled and have a meaningful life. Self-transcendence can be achieved by focusing on goals beyond the self, for instance altruism and obtaining spiritual awakening (Reasonandmeaning.com, 2017)

In contrast, remaining attached to unproductive goals because one believes that they are necessary for future well-being and holding on to them in spite of having an unlikely outcome, could be painful and lead to lower levels of well-being (MacLeod, 2013). In qualifying the relationship between goal-progress and well-being and how it positively contributes to well-being, Sheldon and Elliot (cited in MacLeod, 2013) added that pursuit of these goals should rather stem from internal motivation (e.g. being enjoyed) than external motivation (e.g. pursuing goals out of necessity and need).

In terms of goal content or type of goals, it has been found that intrinsic goals (e.g. feeling competent) are more likely to lead to feelings of well-being than extrinsic goals (e.g. financial success) (MacLeod, 2013).

## **(8) Humour**

Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs included humour as one of the meta-needs or growth motives, which are grouped together with other needs necessary for maximal growth. The motive of humour functions at the highest level to form part of the concept of self-actualisation (Moore, 2013). Maslow (cited in Moore, 2013) postulated that self-actualizers value human nature, caring for society, being independent and spontaneous, having deep personal relationships with others and a sense of humour, being creative, being involved with tasks of a higher calling, and accepting themselves as well as others. According to Frankl (cited in Shantall, 2013) one of the characteristics of a mature or optimally developed person is that such a person possesses the quality of humour, which is regarded as being able to distance oneself from negatives (such as one's own weaknesses and problems) and then being able to laugh at oneself.

Humour or playfulness forms part of the transcendence virtue identified by Peterson and Seligman (2004). They defined it as "[l]iking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes" (p. 30). According to Train et al. (2009), laughter is a very effective way of releasing stress. As indicated previously, optimistic people often use humour instead of denial to cope with stress (Lyubomirsky et al., 2011). Train et al. (2009) highlight research findings that have shown that people who are still able to laugh when they are exposed to severe stress are often protected against the negative effects thereof.

- **Virtues**

- (1) **Hope**

Hope, as a noun, can be defined as “a belief that something you want will happen” (Turnbull, 2010, p. 724), “desire accompanied by expectation of or belief in fulfilment ... expectation of fulfilment or success ... a chance or likelihood for something desired ... something wished for” (Hope, 2017a, pp. 4 & 8) and “the feeling that what is wanted can be had or that events will turn out for the best” (Hope, 2017b, p. 1). Hope is therefore regarded a desire/want, belief or feeling that contains the elements of anticipation/expectation/trust in something or someone that it will happen/be fulfilled, with a strong chance/likelihood/believe/desire of it happening/coming to pass or turn out for the best. Hope forms part of the transcendence virtue identified by Peterson and Seligman (2004) and according to their virtues and strengths categorisation (CSV), hope is a strength that implies to expect the best (for the future), but working for it in order to achieve the best .

Seligman’s (2002) view on the pleasant life includes being optimistic and hopeful about the future, along with thinking constructively about the past and being happier in the present. By using signature strengths one could improve one’s wellbeing; there is a strong link between certain character strengths such as hope, zest and love and life satisfaction (Park & Peterson, 2009; Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Lopez et al. (2015), in reference to Seligman’s article on *Building Human Strength: Psychology’s Forgotten Mission*, points out that certain human strengths, such as hope, along with others such as resilience, optimism, interpersonal skill, honesty, and perseverance guard us against mental ailments. As previously indicated, positive psychology focuses on positive emotions, which concerns present happiness and future hope (Chaudhary et al., 2014). By increasing hope and being optimistic about the future, present happiness can be intensified (Seligman, 2002).

Having a hopeless attitude has a harmful effect on one’s health and physical functioning (Rajaei et al., 2016). General positive expectancy or hope has been found to be associated with coping, as well as remaining positive during negative circumstances (Lyubomirsky et al., 2011). Hope furthermore provides enriched social relationships, greater feelings of empowerment, and improved health through speedier recovery from illness (Lewis, 2011).

Hope forms part of the sacred emotions, which is also fundamental and typical to religious experience and normally associated with it (Emmons, 2005; Emmons & McNamara, 2006). Studies in the field of positive psychology found several religious/spiritual factors associated with hope (Foy et al., 2011). Religious practices, faith and spirituality were found to be a predictive factor of

hope (Lopez et al., 2015). Through faith and religious practices, hope is offered to those dealing with life's end or losses or feelings of being disconnected (James & Gilliland, 2013).

## **(2) Gratitude/appreciation**

Gratitude is defined as “the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness” (Gratitude, 2018). According to Emmons and colleagues (cited in Emmons & McNamara, 2006) gratitude is defined as “an emotional appreciation of and thankfulness for favours received” (p. 13). According to Psychology Today (2017b), gratitude is appreciating what one has as opposed to what one wants. Gratitude, as well as love and social intelligence, form part of the transcendence virtue identified by Peterson and Seligman (2004). They regard it as one's awareness of good things happening to oneself and then being thankful for it. Thankfulness also refers to expressing thankfulness to others and appreciating their efforts (Lopez et al., 2015).

Research on gratitude has indicated that it affects physiological functioning and physical health (Emmons & McNamara, 2006). Appreciation as a positive emotion (i.e. feeling appreciation towards others), has a very positive effect in the body's nervous system and functions pertaining to cardiovascular health. Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005) also indicated that gratitude increases happiness and decreases depression. Grateful thinking has been shown to have benefits such as exercising more regularly, presenting fewer physical symptoms, feeling better about one's life in general and being more optimistic about the near future (Emmons & McNamara, 2006).

According to Passmore and Oades (2016), gratitude has been linked with hope, life satisfaction and proactive action towards others. Expression of gratefulness, especially towards others, can be associated with higher energy levels, optimism and empathy (Psychology Today, 2017b). It also contributes to forming and maintaining relationships. Gratitude inspires people to focus on the positive in life rather than on negative issues (Passmore & Oades, 2016). Gratitude is linked to enhanced well-being and positive functioning in general (Emmons & McNamara, 2006). It has already been indicated that positive relationships exist between the application of strengths and virtues and psychological wellbeing or life satisfaction (Park et al., 2004; Park & Peterson, 2009). Some of the studies in this regard involved, for example, the relationship between gratitude and subjective wellbeing (Seligman et al., 2005). A study by Emmons and McCullough (2003) used the **counting blessings** psychological intervention to investigate and understand this relationship. It was indicated by the researchers in using signature strengths that you could generally improve your wellbeing, and that certain character strengths such as gratitude, shows a strong link to pro-social behaviour, life satisfaction and well-being.

Emmons and McNamara (2006) point out that gratitude is a universal human attribute found across all cultures. Gratitude and appreciation is seen as so-called sacred emotions – those emotions associated with religion and religious experience (Emmons, 2005). Gratitude and kindness are considered by some as religious activities and have shown to produce higher levels of happiness, especially when practiced regularly and purposefully (Lopez et al., 2015). Two types of gratitude can be distinguished, namely religious gratitude (i.e. towards God) and dispositional (or general) gratitude (i.e. towards others). The transcendent nature of gratitude in a theistic sense will be religious if “the perceived benefactor is God ... that is the source of goodness or ‘the first giver of all gifts’” and people who believe in Him will seek “ways to express gratitude and thanksgiving to ... their ultimate giver” (Emmons & McNamara, 2006, p. 14). In the nontheistic sense, gratitude still has spiritual quality through recognising the connectedness between each other as being part of the bigger transcendent context. A study conducted by Aghababaei and Tabik (2013) among Iranian students confirmed previous research findings that religious as well as general gratitude were associated with increased mental health and well-being.

### **(3) Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is defined as “the act of forgiving somebody; willingness to forgive somebody” (Turnbull, 2010, p. 588). The Merriam-Webster online dictionary (Forgiving, 2017) defines forgiving as “willing or able to forgive... allowing room for error or weakness” (p. 1). The definition for the verb **forgive** is

to grant pardon for or remission of (an offense, debt, etc.); absolve ... to give up all claim on account of; remit (a debt, obligation, etc.) ... to grant pardon to (a person) ... to cease to feel resentment against ... to cancel an indebtedness or liability of ... to pardon an offense or an offender. (Forgive, 2017, p. 1)

Furthermore, forgiveness entails being freed from “a negative attachment to the source of a transgression”, which includes the “target of forgiveness to be oneself, another person, or a situation” (Thompson et al. cited in Lopez et al., 2015, p. 324).

As a result of forgiveness, one’s pro-social behaviour can increase; the need for revenge against a transgressor can decrease, allowing more openness to act positively toward such a person (Lopez et al., 2015). Forgiveness also leads to being more compassionate and generous. According to Fincham (2015), forgiveness, viewed from a positive psychology perspective, would imply that it is a human strength that potentially contributes to improving one’s functioning rather than just to guard one against dysfunction. According to him, psychological research and measurement have

mostly been focussing on the negative dimension and more needs to be done to also investigate the positive side to it, such as the benefits of forgiveness. In this regard, forgiveness needs to be considered in relation to optimal human functioning, meaning in life for the individual, as well as the improvement of society. Correlations have been found between forgiveness and well-being, physical health, longevity, and satisfaction with relationships (Lopez et al., 2015). To be able to forgive has been associated with enhanced interpersonal relationships, improved sense of empowerment, being healthier, ability to recover more quickly from diseases, and lower levels of anxiety and depression (Lewis, 2011). Ways and techniques are available to assess forgiveness, which could increase through intervention in order to develop forgiveness (Fincham, 2015).

Forgiveness is regarded as a virtuous action by Lewis (2011). It is viewed as one of the four emotions known as sacred emotions. Sacred emotions are emotions which are normally associated with religion and also fundamental and typical to religious experience (Emmons, 2005; Emmons & McNamara, 2006). The act of forgiveness is generally associated with religion or religious practice (McFadden, 2007; Walborn, 2014). According to McCullough, Bono and Root (2005), all major religions promote forgiveness. People who indicated high religious involvement, such as church attendance and being very religious, assigned higher priority to forgiveness than those who did not (McCullough et al., 2005).

#### **(4) Compassion/empathy**

Compassion can be defined as “a strong feeling of sympathy for people who are suffering and a desire to help them” (Turnbull, 2010, p. 292). Empathy is mentioned in one of Carol Ryff’s (cited in Sze, 2017) six categories of wellbeing, namely **Positive relations with others**, specifically in terms of having strong positive relations. Such positive relations are characterised by warmth, satisfaction, intimacy and trust wherein people care for each other and are able to exhibit strong feelings of empathy and affection. In terms of empathy, weak relationships are characterised by lack of warmth, openness, and care for others. According to Cameron (cited in Lewis, 2011), being compassionate allows one to have deeper and richer relationships with others. As indicated previously, forgiveness is related to compassion as it entails the willingness to have undeserved compassion towards others.

Compassion (and therefore empathy) forms part of the sacred emotions, which, as stated previously, are normally associated with religion and religious experience (Emmons, 2005; Emmons & McNamara, 2006).

In the Merriam-Webster online dictionary (Empathy, 2017) empathy is defined as

the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thought, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objective explicit manner; also: the capacity for this. (p. 1)

Consistent acts of kindness towards others can help build empathy (Passmore & Oades, 2015).

### **(5) Humility/humbleness**

Emmons (2017) regards humility as one of the three very important positive psychology topics – the other two being gratitude and forgiveness. Humility can be defined as “the quality of not thinking that you are better than other people; the quality of being humble”, while being humble is “showing you do not think that you are as important as other people” (Turnbull, 2010, p. 734). Humility also refers to “freedom from pride or arrogance” (Humility, 2017, p. 1). Being humble therefore suggests not thinking one is better than another and being modest without pride.

Maslow (1970) postulated that self-actualizers who are democratic in character show humbleness towards others by being open to learn something from them and are prepared to give another honest respect. Humility is regarded as a psychological virtue or character strength (Emmons, 2017). According to Emmons, it involves a clear and accurate assessment and recognition of oneself in terms of abilities, achievements, own mistakes, inadequacies, and limitations. Furthermore, it also involves openness to new ideas, maintaining a realistic perspective, low self-focus, and appreciating the value of things. Tangney (2009) questions the viewpoint of humility as being an accurate assessment of oneself, when it constitutes forgetting oneself.

When humility is viewed within the context of positive psychology, taking into consideration the humanistic approach, one would rather assume that humility or being humble does not constitute the negative meaning of thinking one is less important than other people, having feelings of insignificance, inferiority, or subservience. The term then suggests importance as an individual, and being a unique person still applies irrespective of status. It also does not imply low self-esteem or self-deprecation (Tangney, 2009). It can therefore be accepted that it would only have the positive meaning of not thinking one is better than others, free from pride (not necessarily meaning to be proud) and arrogance, but being modest and thoughtfully respectful (Humility, 2017; Maslow, 1970; Turnbull, 2010).

Emmons (2017) indicates various advantages of being humble, such as being more successful (than less humble people), more likely to flourish in life, being more admired, viewed and rated by others more positively and as more effective. It was also found that humility was positively related to academic success, leading to higher grades. There are various ways and techniques available to assess humility that could increase through intervention, in order to become more humble.

Taken into consideration the mindfulness and *Ubuntu* principles, humility is determined in relation to others. Mindfulness is the intentional awareness of self and others and involves openness and sensitivity (Lopez et al., 2015; Skjei, 2014). In being humble and mindful then, one would be much more accepting of others, be non-judgmental and show compassion towards others to gain deeper insight and understanding into oneself and others (Dwyer et al., 2014). In terms of the *Ubuntu* principle, humility is used as a term to support the idea of having humbleness as a quality in interpersonal relationships (Viljoen, 2013a). People are interconnected and exist because of others, and therefore in humility one realises and recognises that one's existence is diminished when others are humiliated (Kantor, 2014). As indicated previously, humbleness forms part of the sacred emotions, which is also fundamental and typical to religious experience (Emmons & McNamara, 2006).

## **(6) Honesty/integrity**

Honesty is defined as “uprightness and fairness; truthfulness, sincerity, or frankness; freedom from deceit or fraud” (Honesty, 2017, p. 1). Integrity is defined as “the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles” (Turnbull, 2010, p. 781) or “adherence to moral and ethical principles; soundness of moral character; honesty” (Integrity, 2017, p. 1). According to Thorkildsen and Hanus (2009), honesty in positive psychology, is defined from two viewpoints. From the one viewpoint, it is seen as one's responsibility to be non-deceptive and genuine regarding one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviours. This could also be referred to as honesty-as-authenticity, which involves remaining true to oneself when challenging societal norms. From the other viewpoint, honesty is seen as being sincere and frank in interpersonal relationships or showing a responsibility for always being truthful while interacting with others. This could also be referred to as honesty-as-truthfulness, which involves sincerity and openness in expressing oneself.

To communicate with others with honesty means to be emotionally transparent and open (Skjei, 2014). Integrity, along with other qualities like forgiveness, compassion, hope and optimism, has benefits, such as enabling a person to have enriched interpersonal relationships, an improved sense of empowerment, being healthier and able to recover more quickly from diseases, and being less

likely to experience anxiety and depression (Lewis, 2011). In terms of the *Ubuntu* principle, honesty is also used as a term that can guide us in our relationships and interactions with others and support the idea of being interconnected with others (Viljoen, 2013a). Honesty can contribute to the quality of interpersonal relationships.

### **(7) Altruism/kindness**

Altruism or selflessness can be defined as “the fact of caring about the needs and happiness of other people more than your own” (Turnbull, 2010, p. 41). Kindness is defined as “a benevolent and helpful action intentionally directed towards another person – it is motivated by the desire to help another and not to gain explicit reward or to avoid explicit punishment” (Nugent, 2013, p. 1). It also involves treating another with consideration (Turnbull, 2010). It therefore becomes clear that altruism and kindness is a concern that focusses on another (not the self) and suggests unselfishness and deliberate acts of consideration, caring and helping others without expectation of reward.

Kindness is one of the character strengths, which form part of Peterson and Seligman’s (2004) humanity virtues, along with the other signature strengths of love and social intelligence. To them, it implies doing favours for others. Being kind to others or engaging in altruistic acts enables people to feel enriched in their lives and it provides them with happiness (Seligman, 2002). During acts of altruism and kindness, one can experience flow or loss of self-consciousness and being absorbed in the act of providing happiness to others, so that greater happiness to oneself can be obtained.

Religious activities, such as showing kindness, have been shown to produce higher levels of happiness, especially when practiced regularly and purposefully (Lopez et al., 2015). Being religious has also been shown to have a positive effect on personal and social well-being in terms of providing social support and promoting generativity and altruism, which links to prosocial behaviour (i.e. benefitting others) and tolerance, which in turn contributes to good interpersonal and inter-group relationships (Saroglou, 2013). Pro-social is defined by Emmons (2017) as “[t]houghts, actions, and feelings that are directed towards others and which are positive in nature” (p. 16). In guiding us in our relationships and interactions with others, *Ubuntu* concepts such as morality, humaneness, and hospitality support the idea of having kindness as a quality in interpersonal relationships (Viljoen, 2013a).

In this review of literature, the current researcher presented eight positive enduring psychological traits as character strengths and seven as virtues. Although they may differ from the classification by Peterson and Seligman (2004), they were presented from the researcher’s viewpoint as strengths (i.e. positive enduring characteristics that are psychological-spiritual in nature) or virtues (i.e.



positive enduring characteristics that are religious-spiritual in nature) that could play a crucial role in effecting well-being and quality of life of participants in the current study.

### 3.3.2.4 Positive relationships

Mauss et al. (2011) iterate that “positive emotions produce good outcomes” (p. 739) and in their postulation of how it is done, they state

a key function of emotions is to coordinate a person’s social interactions and relationships. In particular, *positive* emotions serve these functions by communicating to others affiliative intent and approachability and by inducing positive emotional states in others ... In this way, positive emotions foster social connectedness (engagement in close, mutually satisfying relationships) and the formation of long-term cooperative bonds. (p. 739)

Various types of relationships exist, such as working or professional relationships, relationships with family, friends, society and culture, as well as with one-self. Relationships can be romantic, intimate or platonic (Baumeister & Wotman, 1992; Doyle, 2005; Haworth & Hart, 2007).

One of Carol Ryff’s (cited in Sze, 2017) six categories of wellbeing, entails positive relations with others. People have a need for relatedness, which can be expressed and fulfilled in relationship with others. People can have **strong positive relations** with others, which are characterised by having “warm, satisfying, trusting relationships with others”, being concerned about the well-being of others and having “strong empathy, affection, and intimacy” for them (Sze, 2017, p. 4). In contrast, weak relations may be characterised by limited close, trusting relationships with others, lack of warmth, openness, and care for others. People in such relationships are generally isolated and unwilling to compromise. In terms of the PERMA-model theory, social relationships and connections are essential aspects of life (Seligman, 2011b). According to Hatch and colleagues (cited in Haworth & Hart, 2007), well-being stems from one’s ability to create meaningful relationships with others and thereby experience positive emotions.

From the humanistic point of view, and especially in terms of Maslow’s (1970) optimal level of growth and functioning (i.e. self-actualisation), self-actualisers have deeper, more insightful relationships than any other adults. When married, self-actualisers are very committed to their partners, they have only a small number of intimate friends, and usually have quality and close relationships with others, preferring other self-actualisers. They are furthermore fond of children. Maslow (1970) pointed out that self-actualisers accept themselves and others and recognise human

nature for what it is. Part of the Frankl's (cited in Shantall, 2013) viewpoint of finding meaning in life and functioning optimally involves having meaningful relationships with others. Meaningful relationships are achieved in having respect for others and by appreciating them without preconception and judgment.

As seen previously, according to the *Ubuntu* principle a person is defined through her/his connection to other people via relationships and interaction (Viljoen, 2013a). If these relationships are characterised by empathy, compassion, honesty, sharing, and understanding of others, positive relationships can be established. Hogan (2013) recognised Christopher Peterson, an important contributor to positive psychology, as a person who was deeply attached to other people and to whom it was important to understand others. One of Peterson's most famous quotes was "other people matter", which serves as an indication of how important positive relationships are, as others may benefit (us) and contribute significantly to our well-being (Hogan, 2013, pp. 2-3).

Strong relationships with others provide support when confronted with challenges and in difficult circumstances. In terms of positive relations, there is strong evidence that happy people have better interpersonal relationships, more friends, strong social support and companionship, and they tend to be less envious of others than less happy people (Lyubomirsky et al., 2011). Married people also seem to be happier than single, divorced or widowed people. Strong support by others, especially within the family, can be essential to ensure that a person returns to healthy and adequate functioning after a traumatic event. A study by Sixsmith, Boneham and Goldring's (2003) has found that, within a disadvantaged community, close social bonds presented important opportunities for social support and that there was strong support for each other despite various hardships.

As stated previously, mindfulness is about awareness and purposefully paying attention to what is happening or being experienced in the present (Kabat-Zinn cited in Dwyer et al., 2014). Mindfulness not only entails being aware of what happens with ourselves, but also being aware of what happens in relation to others. Minding relations refer to mutual and shared knowledge of thoughts, feelings and actions between people in relationships (Lopez et al., 2015). Baugher (2014) explains sociological mindfulness as "the capacity to see how the many things we do as individuals and members of collectivities are interconnected with the conditions of our own lives and the lives of multiple others, near and far" (p. 84).

Baugher (2014) suggests a mind-shift from only acting in our own interest to considering the broader context of well-being where we are connected to others and to how others are affected by us. According to the philosophy of *Ubuntu*, people belong to a community of people and are shaped

by it – the community and the individual therefore affect each other (Train et al., 2009). Being mindful of others and providing support to others can lead to self-fulfilment and having existential meaning and purpose (Wong, 2014).

As previously indicated, being religious seems to have a positive effect on personal and social well-being; the social support, altruism, prosocial behaviour and tolerance benefit others and contribute positively to interpersonal relationships (Saroglou, 2013). Faith, religion and belief can be vital to some in dealing with death, life's end and/or loss, in providing the necessary hope, comfort and support (James & Gilliland, 2013).

In the current study, positive relations were found to be important to participants in overcoming or moving away from low point experiences towards high point experiences, especially in terms of the value of such relationships for the support received from or provided to others.

### **3.3.2.5 Other indicators of well-being and happiness**

There are some other additional indicators that concern positive psychology and relate to people's well-being and happiness. Such indicators include culture, success and achievement, income and money.

- **Culture**

According to Joshanloo (2014), western cultures have two traditions on well-being, namely hedonic well-being and eudaimonic well-being. It was previously indicated that the former is based on positive feelings and linked to pleasure, while the latter is based on virtue and skills and linked to self-actualisation or optimal functioning (Austin et al., 2013; Vázquez et al., 2009). There are indications that non-western (e.g. eastern cultures) tend to emphasize virtuous or religious activity, self-transcendence, and harmony. In eastern cultures, well-being depends on religious beliefs and views, which differs among the cultural-religious groupings found within the eastern cultures, but generally, tend to accentuate the spiritual (transcendence) and emphasize social and interpersonal harmony (Joshanloo, 2014).

Furthermore, the value assigned to emotions and therefore the experiencing thereof are different for different cultures. In western (individualistic) cultures people value and encourage high arousal emotions, such as joy and anger, more than low arousal emotions, whereas it is the opposite in eastern or collectivistic cultures, where people tend to be more relaxed and calm (Lim, 2016). Kuppens et al. (2008) found that the individualistic culture dimension moderates the relationship between emotions and life satisfaction in that experiencing positive emotions is “more strongly

related to life satisfaction than the absence of negative emotions” (p. 66). In individualistic cultures, having negative emotional experiences is more negatively related to life satisfaction than in collectivistic cultures, while having positive (emotional) experiences are more positively related to life satisfaction within cultures that emphasise self-expression, rather than survival, as values.

Various other aspects relating to culture exist within the context of understanding people as part of positive institutions. In terms of psychological health institutions, it is important to realise that culture plays a very important role in how a person would manage loss and also how a person grieves (James & Gilliland, 2013). There are also cultural differences regarding relationships. Seligman and Peterson (2004) indicated through the CSV that there are universal strengths and virtues, which are valued in nearly every culture all over the world. In this regard, Emmons and McNamara (2006) specifically pointed out that gratitude is a universal human attribute found across all cultures. These virtues or traits are culturally determined and differ in the way societies assign values and norms to them.

- **Success and achievement**

Success may be understood in various different ways by different people. It may be physical, emotional, psychological or financial. It may be intrinsically perceived (e.g. feeling competent) or it may be in the form of tangible (extrinsic) reward (e.g. money and wealth) (Human Capital Institute, 2009; Laakso, 2012). Some value their success according to the achievements they have accomplished. Success is defined as

the favourable or prosperous termination of attempts or endeavors; the accomplishment of one’s goals ... the attainment of wealth, position, honors or the like ... a performance or achievement that is marked by success, as by the attainment of honors ... a person or thing that has had success, as measured by attainment of goals, wealth. (Success, 2017, p. 1)

From a humanistic perspective, success has been regarded as part of the self-esteem needs, according to Maslow’s (1970) hierarchy of needs. This level of needs focuses on ability, competence, success, confidence, and accomplishment. Maslow (cited in Moore, 2013) classified the self-esteem needs according to needs based on personal achievement, for instance to efficiency, capability, confidence, personal strength or independence; and needs related to the esteem of others, for instance social standing, honour, importance, recognition, dignity and appreciation. An important aspect noted by Moore (2013) is that to satisfy one’s self-esteem need implies that recognition is deserved and not unjustified, that esteem should be based on own judgement and real

experience, not just on others' opinion. True self-esteem is independent of external (uncontrollable) factors. Once this is achieved, a person may feel confident and competent as well as valued.

From the positive psychology approach, success or accomplishment can entail various different types of aspects, such as reaching personal goals, receiving awards for personal achievements, having a specific status in society, feeling competent and self-actualised, finding meaning and having a higher purpose in life, or being able to effectively cope with stress and/or trauma, as well as being able to successfully manage and reduce suffering (Grieve et al., 2008; Frankl, 1966; 1969; Lyubomirsky et al., 2011; Maslow, 1994; 1999; MacLeod, 2013). Achieving one's goals can lead to one's success and therefore, well-being. MacLeod (2013) indicated that in terms of goal content or type of goals, it has been found that intrinsic goals (e.g. feeling competent) are more likely to lead to feelings of success and well-being than extrinsic goals (e.g. financial success). A sense of accomplishment can be achieved in having and achieving one's realistic achievable goals.

In terms of successful interpersonal relationships, as previously indicated, there is strong evidence to indicate that happy people enjoy better social relationships (Lyubomirsky et al., 2011). Living in health may also seem to some as successful living. Happy people are generally healthier, mentally healthier and physically healthier in terms of having less unpleasant physical symptoms. Mentally happy people also have fewer symptoms of psychopathology and are less likely to suffer from depression. People who maintained strong positive affect while suffering from various diseases indicated higher quality of life. Environmental factors can either facilitate or limit one's ability to adapt successfully to life's challenges and therefore affect psychological well-being (Haworth & Hart, 2007).

It has been indicated by Lyubomirsky et al. (2011) that happy people are more successful in work life, enjoying more job satisfaction and more advantages when it comes to employment and work quality. People with hope have the expectation of success. Humble people are also more successful (than less humble people), more likely to flourish in life, more admired, viewed and rated positively and effectively by others (Emmons, 2017). Also, according to Exline and Hill (cited in Emmons, 2017) humility is positively associated with academic success.

Lyubomirsky et al. (2011) proposed an alternative to the widely held belief that success leads to happiness by investigating the suggestion that positive affect (and thereby happiness) leads to success. They listed various characteristics related to positive effect, such as confidence, optimism, self-efficacy, likeability, positive construals of others, sociability, activity, energy, prosocial behaviour, immunity, physical well-being, effective coping with challenge and stress, originality

and flexibility. A study conducted by them revealed that happiness is associated with success and it can precede it, in other words, not as a result, but as an influence thereof.

Being ambitious is indicative of striving for accomplishment or having “an earnest desire for some type of achievement or distinction, as power, honour, fame, or wealth, and the willingness to strive for its attainment” (Ambition, 2018, p. 1). A sense of satisfaction, pride and fulfilment can be obtained in achievement of one’s goals.

- **Income and money**

Lyubomirsky et al. (2011) view income as “an important indicator of success in modern societies” and support their opinion through studies showing that happy people are financially successful (p. 82). They found that happier people have higher incomes. Layard (2005) found that in the relationship between income and happiness, increases in income did not relate to equivalent increases of individual happiness. There were even findings by Oishi and Kesebir (2015) to support a negative relationship between economic growth or income and happiness, especially when economic income inequality was involved. They found that an increase in income inequality was associated with a decrease in happiness. These findings propose a paradox, as it is widely believed that income has a positive effect on happiness. However, a positive relationship between income and happiness was found to be present in less developed countries (Drakopoulos, 2013).

Drakopoulos (2013) suggests two explanations for the income and happiness paradox. Firstly, in terms of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, where primary needs have to be met before secondary needs can become important, his explanation entails that income is necessary to satisfy basic (primary) needs and would thus lead to satisfaction or happiness only to a certain degree. If the basic needs are met, but secondary needs, which then become important, are not, even an increase in income could not make a person happier. Thus happiness would be more dependent on needs being satisfied than just receiving more money. Secondly, comparisons between a person’s income and that of another can explain why an increase in income does not necessarily cause a person to be happier. A person’s happiness is more dependent on a person’s relative income position (compared to others) than the income itself. Easterlin (2001) found that there are two different life (income) cycle tracks in terms of people with higher and those with lower incomes. Those with higher (or more) education are on average happier throughout the life cycle than those with lower (or less) education.

Diener and Biswas-Diener (cited in Mazzucchelli & Purcell, 2015) have shown that there is only an initial relationship between financial resources and well-being, which ceases to exist once basic needs are met. According to Deacon (2008), although money does not buy happiness, it enables a

person to afford better and higher levels of education and help one overcome real-life challenges, which would otherwise not have been possible. A possible explanation why higher income individuals are happy is that they have more opportunities to buy material belongings and services and therefore attain a higher status (or perceived importance of value) in society. Subsequently, the poor are then unhappy (Frey & Stutzer, 2002).

### **3.3.3 Limitations and criticism of positive psychology**

Positive psychology has been criticised for being overly used and original thought regarding its fundamental principles, not sufficiently being critically evaluated (Wong, & Roy, 2017). Further criticism includes claims that many studies in the positive psychology field lacked scientific proof, as these studies could not be replicated. Miller (2008) argues that positive psychology fails to clearly define certain terms and that generalisations are sometimes unjustified. In his opinion, “positive psychology merely associates mental health with a particular personality type: a cheerful, outgoing, goal-driven, status-seeking extravert” (p. 591). In addition, Pérez-Álvarez (2016) also questions the authenticity of being able to study happiness scientifically. It is pointed out that pursuing happiness might not be the ultimate object of study (as positive psychology in certain term suggests), but that there may be “better things in life ... for example, living a significant, valuable life, which is not necessarily happy” (p. 1).

### **3.3.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the phenomenological approach and positive psychology theory were discussed in detail. The phenomenological approach was chosen to obtain a subjective perspective on the participants’ turning-point experiences and then make sense of it from a positive psychological viewpoint.

From a positive psychology perspective, it is clear that a human being is complex, has various capabilities and attributes, strengths (and weaknesses), but has an inner will to be well, happy and fulfilled with purpose and meaning. In the words of Shah and Marks (cited in Dodge et al., 2012) the following can be said about well-being: “Well-being is more than just happiness”. In line with the humanistic approach, a person therefore strives to be actualised, not just to her/himself, but also in terms of a higher purpose or towards a position of transcendence. The positive psychological perspective does not focus on the individual alone, but also considers the context and others around the individual as important to fulfilment and being well. Some critique on positive psychology was mentioned; nevertheless, in the current study the researcher maintained positive psychology’s useful value as a perspective in describing and understanding the participants’ turning-point experiences.

In the next chapter, familiar rags to riches stories will be presented to serve as contextual background in assistance to understanding participants' emerged story themes presented as findings later on.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND STORIES: RAGS TO RICHES

#### 4.1 Context: Introduction

Is the world a better place today and are we happier today than previous generations? Authors seem to disagree on these questions. One of the reasons why the world is not better off today, is that a gap exists between the mass of information available and the use thereof. Although there is much more information available, it is not equally available to all (Sartorius, 2007). According to Sartorius (2007), “those who have access to information are advancing very fast, leaving those who do not have it further and further behind” (p. 1). Diamandis (2016) has provided various charts in support of the view that the world is better off today. For instance, in general in all regions across the globe, the quality of life has improved, the world’s population is more literate, average number of years of education has increased, infant mortality rates have decreased, and violent crimes and homicides have decreased in the United States and Europe respectively.

According to certain authors, we are happier than our ancestors and forefathers. (Debate.org, 2017; GD Topics, 2015; Kahn, 2012). According to Debate.org (2017), on the question, “were our forefathers happier than us?”, 52% indicated ‘yes’ and 48% indicate ‘no’ (p. 1). It seems that young people are happier today than before (Grossberg, 2017; Khan, 2012; Pappas, 2015; Wallace, 2012). The reasons posed for teens being happier than before, include having more confidence, being more competent and having improved positive relationships with parents (Wallace, 2012). Other general reasons for being happier today, seemingly stems from being scientifically and technically more advanced than before, being financially more comfortable, having dealt with various diseases, having rights of freedom and hope (AmberC, 2013; GD Topics, 2015; Khan, 2012).

However, there are also those who seem to think we are not being happier today than our ancestors. Reasons for this are that today we lack “[g]oodwill, mutual sympathy, love, affection, respect, service, sacrifice”, our means of obtaining money has become corrupted and man (or woman) “has become a slave to the machines” (Khan, 2012, p. 1). Others pose that we lack “joy, love, certitude, [and] peace” compared to our forefathers (GD Topics, 2015). Experiencing real happiness, in comparison to previous generations, “lies in contentment, friendliness, brotherhood, unselfishness, service, sacrifice...” (Khan, 2012, p. 1).

In the world today, many people seem to have made it big time. There are more millionaires today than ever before (Snibbe, 2017; Parker, 2017). There are also numerous rags to riches stories

unheard of before (Greenberg, 2007; Goldschein & Eisenberg, 2011; Stone, 2015; Velayanikal, 2014). The world, predominantly the western world, but increasingly also the rest of the world, is characterised by reality and entertainment shows depicting people who unexpectedly achieved ‘glorious success’ (Emma, 2017; Nerl, 2014; Patell, 2015). This increase in successes globally impelled the current researcher to become interested in investigating and understanding what an individual experiences and what aspects are involved for a person to be able to overcome negative background experiences and move beyond it towards an outstanding positive experience, such as success.

In order to have a general background understanding of the participants’ stories, which the researcher was going to obtain through interviews, he decided to read up on popular rags to riches stories. These stories interest him and seemed to interest other people globally as well. The researcher therefore summarised a few stories he would regard suitable to consider along with the participants’ stories in the current study. He selected the stories based on similarity features in comparison to the study’s participant group (see discussion later on under *4.2 Rags to riches stories: Introduction*). He would therefore take into consideration a few global, African and South African rags to riches stories’ themes as presented in the public media. These themes were not identified or determined through scientific analysis, but intuitively determined by the researcher to be used as a means of providing broad background context of similar stories to the study for an improved in-depth understanding of participants’ stories later on.

#### **4.1.1 The broader socio-cultural context**

It was important to the current researcher to be able to contextualise the study within the broader South African/African socio-cultural context and even beyond, within (the broadest) global context, especially when it comes to rags to riches stories.

Humans live in a globalised culture today due to international integration and the interchanging of “world views, products, ideas, and other aspects of culture” (Mehlika, 2013, p. 2). Large-scale globalisation has been taking place during the past 50 years or so. Cultures are more interconnected and interdependent today. Migration and movement of people have been a major influence due to the advancements in communication and transport, as well as the distribution of knowledge being quicker and on a much larger scale. The global context within which South Africa finds itself is mainly as a developing country and part of the developing BRICS (i.e. Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) countries (Mabanga, 2015). We live in a post-slavery (starting in the Cape Colony with the freeing of 35000 slaves in 1834 and truly ending post 1994), post-world wars (1<sup>st</sup>

World War and 2<sup>nd</sup> World War) and post-apartheid time era (Michigan State University [MSU], n.d.; South African History Online [SAHO], 2011). It is mainly considered, at least for the majority of global occupants, a peaceful time, where human rights apply for most, where democracies become the political trend globally, where technological advances are ensuring longer and healthier lives and where general respect for human dignity becomes a slowly emerging reality.

South African citizens are all too aware of the country's historical political past. After the end of the oppressive apartheid regime in 1994, when the first democratic elections in the country led to the acceptance of a constitution, which included human rights for all citizens, most citizens of the country were expecting only the best for their future. More than 20 years later that rosy future did not materialise for all, but rather new economic and socio-political challenges were unveiled. Two examples of such new challenges, which became part of the context within which citizens of the country live, are unemployment and corruption (Corruption Watch, 2014; Massiah, 2014).

According to Spirkin (1983) culture is the

form of human activity ... generalised into certain modes or methods of its realisation, in... forms of the existence of spirit ... in palpable material forms, objects... something created by human beings ... a necessary condition for humanity's ... existence and development ... Culture is created by mankind, by the nation, the class, the social group and the individual. (p. 6)

The dictionary of psychology (Matsumoto, 2009) adds to the definition of culture regarding it as "human-made ... shared understandings ... a network of ... interconnected knowledge items produced ... address complex ... problems in society ... to meet individual's psychological needs ... encoded in social institutions" (p. 146). It could be viewed as the **memory of human kind** that is often unconsciously present; and includes "customs, beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, art, technology, and language" (p. 146). Cultural differences exist between groups due to differences in these inclusions. It is clear that culture may have a very substantial influence and effect on humans and on being human as it enables one to see and understand oneself, others and the world from one's cultural worldview or perspective. How we psychologically identify ourselves as a member of a distinct culture, grants us cultural identity (Matsumoto, 2009). Culture develops in response to changes in the social environment and can be transmitted or carried over from one generation to another. The concept of culture seems to be an encompassing all-inclusive fundamental one to our human existence.

This research study was conducted among citizens of South Africa, a country that is known for its diverse cultures. Although the participants were from various cultural backgrounds, they were not specifically asked which type of culture influences them or which culture they identify with. Taking the historical background of the country (of the past 500 years) into consideration, the researcher believed the cultural background of the group of participants would partly consist of the individualistic culture, mainly influenced by Westernised thought, and partly of the collectivistic culture, mainly influenced by Socialist/Africanism thought.

In individualistic cultures autonomy is strongly valued (Ciccarelli & White, 2017) and they tend to focus on the individual (personal preferences and goals), independent of the group (Matsumoto, 2009). In collectivistic cultures the group (its traditions, norms and goals) to which individuals belong, becomes important (Matsumoto, 2009). Loyalty to the family is strongly valued (Ciccarelli & White, 2017). It is generally accepted that in South Africa more people identify with the collectivistic culture (Ciccarelli & White, 2017). The researcher would aim to accommodate both types of culture as part of determining what quality of life meant to participants (as members of the South African society), as well as what it meant to experience reaching one's destiny as viewed through moving away from a low point towards a high point.

#### **4.1.2 Participants' story context**

The participants told the researcher their significant 'low point – high point' stories and were required to discuss how they were able to move from the low to the high point (their turning-point experience). It seemed that to expect only one low and one high point with a definite turning-point in-time in-between was too simplistic.

##### **4.1.2.1. Low point or low points; high point or high points?**

During the interview sessions with participants, the research question of the study was presented to participants as an open question to allow them to freely talk and tell their individual stories. As the general guideline, and in order to qualify as a participant, each participant needed to have had the experience of a (significant) low point in her/his life along with a (significant) high point in her/his life. Once these criteria were met, the study's aim was to investigate the thoughts, feelings, sayings, actions and/or beliefs involved during the process of moving away, or out of the low point, towards and finally reaching the high point.

As free-talking was predominantly pursued, participants were not pertinently asked during the interview process to describe or define only **one** specific low point or **one** specific high point

experienced in their lives. They only needed to have had experienced **at least** one low point and one high point, the latter being **in relation to** and following the former. As one would expect, findings indicated that individuals' stories differed in the way they determined and considered, from their own point of view, what a significant low or high point meant to them. Some, for example, had specific and clearly defined low and high points and others less specific and/or clearly defined.

Each participant indicated to the researcher that she/he did qualify as a participant, established during the introductions at the first meetings and confirmed by the researcher through analysis. In most cases, especially in the RoL drawings, which specifically requested it, participants indicated a specific low point along with a specific high point. Nevertheless, in various cases, as contained within their interview stories and discovered through detailed analysis, more than one low point and/or high point existed. These points would sometimes serve as an addition to the specific (singular) low or high point or sometimes indicate that the low and/or high point was extended over time. Each participant would then be regarded as having only one significant main low point (viewed as a general low, even if different points existed over time), while in addition, if at least one meaningful high point was reached, it would be seen as the participant's significant high point.

#### **4.1.2.2 Context within the text (transcribed stories)**

Participant's individual stories were unique. The way they told their stories spontaneously would differ from participant to participant. Nevertheless, through telling their stories within the margins of (a) low point(s) and high point(s), the researcher was able to contextualise the stories. The richness of data obtained from their descriptions of low and high point(s) contributed to the understanding of their turning-point experiences. In consideration of this context, the researcher would be able to determine background to their experiences, personal psychological, social and religious/spiritual determinants to their experiences, as well as the degree to which participants experienced their turning-points.

#### **4.2 Rags to riches stories: Introduction**

Although the well-known adage "from rags to riches" has a very literal meaning, in this study, the researcher used it in a **figurative** way and applied it to people who succeeded in moving from an **impoverished** low point in their lives to an **enriched** high point. In most known rags to riches stories, the saying has a very literal meaning, referring to someone who moved from poverty or obscurity to wealth or fame, sometimes quite rapidly. Nevertheless, the researcher became interested in this phenomenon and wanted to know what the journey entailed to get from the low to the high.

Rags to riches stories seem to have a social and popular appeal to them, which served as an indication to the researcher, that, in general, people were aware of the phenomenon of having success or being successful and famous in contrast to once being dismal, miserable, poor or from a disadvantaged background. The researcher was pursuing a formal scientific understanding of this phenomenon, and he decided to select everyday people as participants with stories of success being characterised by first being ‘poor’, disadvantaged or from miserable backgrounds or situations, to then being characterised as ‘rich’, enriched or happy through experiencing something much better than before. The inclusion of the specific stories that were selected was based on similarity aspects in comparison to the current study’s participants such as, being of similar gender, race, background, and having similar low point experience as well as selecting people from various age groups, similar to the current study’s participant group. Fame was not a consideration of this study, although some of the participants were known in respect of their achievements.

The idiom ‘rags to riches’ was chosen by the researcher as fitting for the title of the study to describe this now frequently occurring phenomenon. It was chosen for its figurative meaning and not the literal meaning. The figurative meaning was not to say that the change or high points were not concrete, but meant that the study did not focus on extreme poverty/or being largely unknown to moving to being very rich/famous. The study aimed at determining (internal abstract) psychological and spiritual aspects regarding participants’ turning-point experiences and not (external concrete) financial/economical/material aspects. The researcher was interested in participants’ experiences and therefore it was important that they had a noteworthy and significant change in experience as well.

#### **4.2.1 Rags to riches stories of the world**

On the internet there are numerous writings available regarding people’s stories on the matter of rags to riches. When typing the words ‘rags to riches’ into three of the more popular internet search engines, the following responses are obtained: Google (537,000 results); Bing (1,900,000 results) and Yahoo (1,240,000 results). By closer inspection, these stories range between various aspects relating to people’s quality of life (for example, where individuals were at a low financially, socially, physically, and/or spiritually), but who thereafter managed to be at a higher (or even very high) point of quality of life. It is clear that there is a lot of information available throughout the world regarding rags to riches stories, where individuals who have managed to undergo a significant change from a negative to a positive experience regarding their quality of life. Nevertheless, what can these stories tell us about ourselves and about the possibility of experiencing

it ourselves? Here then are a few rags to riches stories of inspiration, containing highlighted themes, which the researcher considered in contextualising the participants' own rags to riches stories.

#### **4.2.1.1 Guy Laliberté**

Goldschein and Eisenberg (2011) reported on some of the world's top billionaires who overcame "life's toughest challenges" to create something for themselves (p. 1). For instance, the Canadian-born Guy Laliberté, founder and former CEO of Cirque du Soleil (one of the most well-known circuses in the world), started off as a street performer. He was unemployed and lived off unemployment insurance during his younger adult life (Celebs101.com, 2017). Guy risked everything "by bringing a successful troupe from Quebec to the Los Angeles Arts Festival in 1987, with no return fare" (Goldschein & Eisenberg, 2011, p. 1). From there on, the circus was brought to Las Vegas and later on became such a huge success that its database mentions performances in 350 cities worldwide and 75000 performing artists (Goldschein & Eisenberg, 2011; CEO Magazine, 2017). Laliberté's total worth is estimated at \$2.5 billion (Goldschein & Eisenberg, 2011).

- **Themes**

- (1) Taking the risk;
- (2) Determination/perseverance;
- (3) Taking responsibility; and
- (4) Do not let background/setback/being unemployed stop you.

#### **4.2.1.2 Ursula Burns**

According to Goldschein and Eisenberg (2011), Ursula Burns, who is "the first African-American woman to be the head of a Fortune 500 Company", namely Xerox, was raised by her single mother in a housing project of the Lower East Side of Manhattan (p. 2). They were poor, her mother who owned a day care centre and "ironed shirts so that she could afford to send Ursula to Catholic school" (Goldschein & Eisenberg, 2011, p. 2). Ursula completed a master's degree in engineering, and started with Xerox as an intern (Byrnes, 2009). She faced challenges experienced by the company, took on increased responsibilities and handled multiple tasks. She is known to be very frank amongst her colleagues. Concerning her position, she said, "I'm in this job because I believe I earned it through hard work and high performance ... I imagine race and gender got the hiring guys' attention ... the rest was really up to me" (Byrnes, 2009, p. 3).

- **Themes**

- (1) Hard work;

- (2) Being frank;
- (3) Striving towards higher education/qualification;
- (4) High performance;
- (5) Determination/dedication/perseverance;
- (6) Taking responsibility (personal and work-related); and
- (7) Do not let background/setback/being poor stop you.

#### **4.2.1.3. Li Ka-shing**

After Li Ka-shing's father died when he was 15 years old, his family fled China and moved to Hong Kong soon afterwards (Goldschein & Eisenberg, 2011). He quit school and worked in a plastic factory for up to 16 hours a day to support his family (Pegg, 2014; Stone, 2015). He was able to start his own company 10 years later and has become one of the world's richest East Asians. He has been able to build a multi-ranged business empire. Ka-shing achieved his success through hard work and was reputed for "remaining true to his internal moral compass" (Nohria & Gurtler, 2004, p. 1). According to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index (cited by Velayanikal, 2014), in 2014 he had an estimated net worth of \$31.9 billion.

- **Themes**

- (1) Hard work;
- (2) Integrity;
- (3) Internal moral value;
- (4) Determination/dedication/perseverance;
- (5) Support to others; and
- (6) Do not let background/setback/being a refugee stop you.

#### **4.2.1.4 J.K. Rowling**

This United Kingdom-born mother is world famous for writing the Harry Potter book series. The setbacks she experienced included, the loss of her mother, relocation to Portugal, divorce, and having to live on welfare with her dependent child as a single mother, while also suffering from clinical depression (Goldschein & Eisenberg, 2011; Pegg, 2014). She continued to take care of her child. At times, she had to write on scraps of tissue paper "from the numerous cafes they visited to let her daughter sleep", but in the end, over 400 million Harry Potter books were sold and she obtained worldwide success with an estimated net worth of \$1 billion (Pegg, 2014, p. 9).



- **Themes**

- (1) Resilience;
- (2) Determination/dedication/perseverance;
- (3) Support to others; and
- (4) Do not let background/setback/being a divorced, single mother or suffering from depression stop you.

#### **4.2.1.5 Do Won Chang**

The South Korean-born Do Won Chang moved with his family from Korea to America during the 1980's (SuccessStory.com, 2017). According to Pegg (2014), after the move he worked as "a janitor, gas station employee, and coffee shop attendant to support his family" (p. 17). He opened a small retail store in Los Angeles, called Fashion 21. Today, Forever 21 is a hose own retail company with more than 450 stores in almost 50 countries (SuccessStory.com, 2017). His company's outlets generate an estimated \$3 billion annually (Pegg, 2014). It is said about Do Won Chang that he obtained this through 'dreaming big' and a lot of effort and perseverance (SuccessStory.com, 2017, p. 2). It has been said about him that, "[a]part from being a devoted and aggressive businessman, he is also a very spiritually inclined person ... an ardent believer in Christianity" who supports charity work with churches across the world and who is very attached to family (SuccessStory.com, 2017, p. 2).

- **Themes**

- (1) Hard work/lots of efforts;
- (2) Dreams/goal orientated;
- (3) Understanding of business and culture;
- (4) Determination/dedication/devotion/perseverance;
- (5) Spirituality/religiousness;
- (6) Value of family;
- (7) Support to others (charity, churches and family); and
- (8) Do not let background/setback/being a refugee stop you.

#### **4.2.1.6 Oprah Winfrey**

Oprah Winfrey is most famous for the Oprah Winfrey Show. She was the first African-American billionaire (Biography.com, 2017). She owns a magazine called *O: The Oprah Magazine*, and is involved with various charities, such as education for girls in South Africa and relief for victims of Hurricane Katrina (Biography.com, 2017, p. 4). According to Biography.com (2017), her *Angel*

*Network* has raised more than \$51 million for charitable programs (p. 4). She came from a very poor upbringing and “spent the first six years of her life living with her grandmother, wearing dresses made out of potato sacks” (Goldschein & Eisenberg, 2011, p. 6). She was molested as a child, became pregnant, ran away from home and then lost the child shortly after birth (Pegg, 2014). Her life changed when she obtained a full scholarship to go to college, won a beauty competition, was discovered by a radio station and started to work in radio and television broadcasting (Biography.com, 2017; Pegg, 2014). She co-anchored the local evening news at 19 years of age, and after being reassigned to the daytime-talk-show environment, started hosting her own show. She became a millionaire at 32 years of age “when her talk show went national” (Velayanikal, 2014, p. 5). The result of her success can be attributed to “her emotional ad-lib delivery” and also being “credited with creating a more intimate confessional form of media communication” (according to Velayanikal, 2014, p. 5). Her estimated net worth is over \$2.9 billion.

- **Themes**

- (1) Hard work;
- (2) Resilience;
- (3) Higher education;
- (4) Goal orientated/driven;
- (5) Emotional/Intimate/Caring/Genuine approach;
- (6) Determination/Dedication/Perseverance;
- (7) Support to others (charity and education); and
- (8) Do not let background/setback/poverty/being abused stop you.

#### **4.2.2 Rags to riches stories from Africa**

##### **4.2.2.1 Kwabena Adjei**

Makura (2009) regards Adjei’s story a rags to riches story. He was a poor and uneducated young man from Ghana, who later developed a highly profitable herbal alcoholic drink that protects those who drink it against various types of ailments (Makura, 2009). Although he was told from a young age (and believed it) that he was very clever, he dropped out of high school, but later enrolled at an adult education institution for a correspondence course in subjects such as mathematics, accountancy, geography, history and English (Makura, 2009). This education was instrumental in building knowledge regarding his future endeavours. His ambitious character is acknowledged by Makura (2009) in viewing him as a “driven and focused person, never losing sight of his goal” (p. 53), as well as one for whom “going back to his village was not an alternative ... neither was

failure” (p. 52). In his own words, Adjei confessed, “I wanted to prove to my hometown that ... I would not go back empty-handed – so that was the drive” (p. 52).

Adjei claims that, while studying business subjects at an entrepreneurial development organisation, he was asked, “In three years’ time, after you have left the school, where do you see yourself?” (Makura, 2009, p. 59). He then responded by saying, “I will be the best or the biggest alcohol manufacturing company in Ghana” (p. 59). In answering his friend on how it came true, he said, “It was because I was working towards that ... I wanted to be the best ... It had always been my motivation, to lead, not to follow ... I can’t just be following like that. I need to excel” (p. 59). According to Makura (2009), Adjei is a “self-taught man who reads business and motivational books, which he likes to quote. Some of the reflections on his own life’s journey and pertaining to success and general outlook, include the following: “I believe that anybody is capable of succeeding in life, provided you have a dream and the desire”.

- **Themes**

- (1) Dream/Desire/Goal (to be the best) motivated/driven;
- (2) Higher education and reading books;
- (3) Self-taught;
- (4) Strong mind-set (positive attitude);
- (5) Determination/Ambition/Aspiration/Perseverance/Persistence;
- (6) Need to lead/excel;
- (7) Prove self to others;
- (8) Not looking back (not focused on past);
- (9) Failure not an option; and
- (10) Do not let background/setback/not being educated/poverty stop you;

#### **4.2.2.2 Olajumoke Orisaguna**

This Nigerian-born top model was once a bread seller (Nigerianbiography, 2016). She was discovered by a professional photographer who took her photograph while she was selling bread. She was formally trained as a hairdresser (Nigerianinfopedia, 2017). Married with two children, they struggled financially and she and her daughter had to move to Lagos for work. According to Nigerianinfopedia (2017) she “worked extra hard for about a year to make ends meet for her family ... she would sell her bread from 2.30 p.m. in the afternoon to 11 p.m. in the evening for a profit of N350 per day” (p. 1). She was caught in a photograph by accident, taken by the artist TY Bello in passing by (Nigerianbiography, 2016). Bello decided to search for her, and put her picture on Style

magazine's cover. After he found her again, she was offered a “modelling contract, internship and work, despite not being fluent in English language” (p. 1). She became famous through social media (Smart and Relentless, 2016).

Olajumoke Orisaguna herself commented on her life in saying, “I cannot leave my husband. He, too, cannot leave me, because we love each other. My marriage will remain intact by God's grace. And God will also help me to continue to be level-headed” (p. 1). She is estimated to be worth over 20 million Naira (Olayinka, 2016). She was also quoted to have said, “I never expected this would ever happen to me” (Smart and Relentless, 2016, p. 4).

- **Themes**

- (1) Hard work;
- (2) Determination/Dedication/Commitment/Perseverance;
- (3) Humbleness;
- (4) Level-headedness;
- (5) Social media;
- (6) Faith in God/Religious;
- (7) Strong family (i.e. marriage) values;
- (8) Support to others (family); and
- (9) Do not let past (background/poverty/struggling financially) hold you back to achieve success.

#### **4.2.2.3 Anas Sefrioui**

Anas Sefrioui, who was born in Morocco, was once a high school dropout (Richest.com, 2017). He is a self-taught businessperson in real estate who, according to La Rédaction (2014) “stopped his studies before A-level to work with his father” (p. 1). They worked on a project for a body and hair washing clay, which allowed him to gain the necessary business knowledge and skills to run his own business later on (Adaramola, 2013). His company concerned itself with constructing many subsidised houses for the Moroccan government (Ngugi, 2016). His company was also involved in construction in other Western African countries and he aspires to build many more homes in the rest of Africa (La Rédaction, 2014). Sefrioui is said to be “a workaholic who seldom takes some moments of respite: just two annual breaks for holidays” (p. 1). He has been quoted to repeatedly say, “I am Mister Everybody” (La Rédaction, 2014, p. 1). His net worth is estimated to be \$1.3 billion (TheRichest.com, 2017).

- **Themes**

- (1) Hard work;
- (2) Commitment;
- (3) Business knowledge and skills;
- (4) Strong mind-set/confidence (open-mindedness);
- (5) Self-taught;
- (6) Determination/aspiration;
- (7) Goal-orientated/motivated/driven (to become bigger);
- (8) Versatility;
- (9) Support to others (community and government); and
- (10) Do not let past (background/dropping out of school) hold you back to achieve success.

#### **4.2.3 Rags to riches stories from South Africa**

##### **4.2.3.1 Herman Mashaba**

South African born Herman Mashaba came from a small village around Hammanskraal, Pretoria where he was brought up “in a community of thieves” (Makura, 2009, p. 63). “We survived by stealing - the whole community ... the whole community had to steal to survive ... but I’m quite proud of the people because they didn’t just let themselves become victims of circumstance” (p. 63). Mashaba himself proved how he managed not to become a victim of his own circumstances. His father died when he was three years old and his mother had to take care of him and his four sisters on the salary of a domestic worker. He went to school during the apartheid years, when Blacks/Africans had limited opportunities to excel. He also had to endure regular and harsh punishments at school. (Makura, 2009). Mashaba stated, “I don’t come from an educational background” (Makura, 2009, p. 65). Herman Mashaba managed to become one of South Africa’s greatest entrepreneurs and is famous as owner of the prominent hair and cosmetics company, *Black Like Me*.

He managed to move beyond his circumstances and become successful by wanting “to be something one day” (Makura, 2009, p. 66). While looking at others who spent many years working for an employer and then to lose their jobs, he decided that it was not worth it. He then asked himself, “What’s the point? To wait 40 years hoping that it’s going to happen in our next life? I wanted it to happen now; I was not prepared to waste my life” (p. 67).

- **Themes**

- (1) Desire/Goal orientated/driven;

- (2) Strong will/mind-set (positive attitude);
- (3) Determination/ambition/aspiration;
- (4) Not having a victim outlook;
- (5) Seize the day (now orientated)/not wasting time;
- (6) Overcome criminal circumstances/environment (in community); and
- (7) Do not let background/circumstances/not being educated/poverty/limited opportunities stop you.

#### **4.2.3.2 Richard Maponya**

Richard Maponya, well-known and beloved South African entrepreneur, started his business during the apartheid years, but in spite of challenges turned out to become a very successful businessperson. He was regularly targeted by others to fail, including being harassed by hit squads and attempts of arson, but he refused to give in to threats on his life or business (Makura, 2009). He came from a poor family of farm-workers, who struggled to have proper meals. He started to grow his own vegetables to support his family. He originally wanted to become a teacher, but went into retail instead. Later in life, he would become the owner of many successful discount supermarkets and at one stage the “single largest employer in Soweto” (p. 267). He later diversified his exploits into retailing fuel, starting his own motor dealership, and bottling and distributing Coca-Cola products. From retail, he also went into property, being jointly responsible for the R650 million Maponya Mall in Soweto. He commented on his successes by saying, “The reason I succeeded during the apartheid era was because I never took ‘no’ for an answer ... I never gave up when the door was slammed in my face” (Makura, 2009, pp. 259-260).

- **Themes**

- (1) Dream/desire/goal-orientated/driven;
- (2) Resilience;
- (3) Strong will/mind-set (positive attitude);
- (4) Self-driven/motivated;
- (5) Determination/perseverance/persistence/aspiration;
- (6) Overcome threats to life/business/success (in political environment);
- (7) Not taking ‘no’ for an answer;
- (8) Support to others (family)/creating jobs; and
- (9) Do not let background/circumstances/poverty/threats/apartheid system stop you.

#### **4.2.3.3 Ndaba Ntsele**

Makura (2009) regards Ntsele as “one of the very few black success stories that came out of South Africa during the struggle years” (p. 203). He and his partners became millionaires before the age of thirty, in spite of strict rules and regulations under apartheid (Makura, 2009). From an early age, he was skilled in selling goods, interacting with people and counting money. He started off “selling peanuts, apples and bananas with his aunt” on a small scale, but moved up through the ranks, selling apples, newspapers and then peaches on an even larger scale. He was smart and did well in school, came from a middle class family (consisting of eight siblings) and started working post-matric in bureaucratic institutions.

Although finding himself within the midst of apartheid’s dominance period and amongst activists in the neighbourhood he grew up in, Ntsele did not become a political activist, but rather “create[d] change through capitalism” and also distinguished himself from the rest (Makura, 2009, p. 207). Being influenced by multimillionaires in the country, as well as entrepreneurs in his family, he decided not to go the traditional way of retail to make it big, but went into the construction business instead. With two other people, he started the Pamodzi Property Construction, which would later become Pamodzi Investment Holdings. Through manufacturing, marketing and distribution of food brands they started earning billions of rands (Makura, 2009). Since then, Pamodzi Group has been established and expanded with various other interests such as mining, engineering, debt collection and truck sales (Witbooi, 2015). He said, “[e]ven at high school I saw myself as a millionaire” (Makura, 2009, p. 207). He also strongly believes in teamwork.

- **Theme**

- (1) Dream/desire/goal-orientated/driven;
- (2) Strong will/mind-set (positive attitude);
- (3) Self-driven/motivated;
- (4) Determination/perseverance/persistence/aspiration/ambition;
- (5) Skills (selling, people and finances);
- (6) Overcome challenges to business because of the political system/environment;
- (7) Teamwork;
- (8) Contribution/change in society; and
- (9) Do not let background/circumstances/poverty/apartheid system stop you.

#### **4.2.3.4 Angus Buchan**

One other rags to riches story is the story of Angus Buchan. He was a farmer who had to move from Zambia to South Africa and start afresh. With barely anything to his name and relatively poor, he could only afford a farm without a house and running water (Buchan, Greenough & Waldeck, 2009; “Angus Buchan: Faith like potatoes”, 2006). He had a religious life-changing experience, and started to believe and have faith in God to help him turn his life’s situation around. Angus had to face many challenges and turmoil. According to Amazon.com (2018) his “bold faith has carried him through droughts, family tragedies, and financial crisis ... [h]e has seen wonderful miracles of provision and healing” (p. 1).

Buchan (2011) believes the one important thing that people who become famous apply in their lives, is being persistent in vision and refusing to give up. According to him, persistence makes people extraordinary, without it, they would not have been able to advance or achieve anything. In spite of his humble background and lack of higher education, today Angus is an international evangelist and successful farmer (Amazon.com, 2018; Mukuzunga, 2010). He has been called by Davis (2017) “[o]ne of the most powerful white men in South Africa ... an evangelist ... he proved capable of drawing a crowd of almost a million people to a prayer gathering outside Bloemfontein” (p. 1).

- **Themes**

- (1) Religious life-changing experience;
- (2) Prayer/faith;
- (3) Trust in God;
- (4) Extraordinary life/miracles;
- (5) Determination/perseverance/persistence;
- (6) Dream/desire/goal orientated/driven;
- (7) Humbleness;
- (8) Overcome challenges/setbacks caused by circumstance/nature; and
- (9) Do not let circumstances/poverty/draught/being uneducated stop you.

#### **4.2.4. Summary and discussion of rags to riches story themes**

The above rags to riches stories have presented some interesting common themes regarding aspects that contributed to turning-point experiences. Many of the stories indicated that the people involved were goal- or dream orientated, were determined and persevered, worked hard, were committed and did not let their background situation stop them or hold them back from achieving success. Many



unique themes were presented as well. These included religion/ spirituality/faith in God; strong mind-set/will (positive attitude); higher education/ qualification; business knowledge and skills, support to others, strong family values, humbleness, resilience, lots of efforts, high performance, devotion, integrity, versatility, being frank, taking responsibility; and taking a risk.

In accordance to the literal meaning of rags to riches, many of the subjects of these stories were once very poor and afterwards became very rich (a concrete or material change) and obtained fame in the process as well. Other changes included moving from being uneducated to being educated; being abused to being a caregiver, being unsupported and depressed to rendering support to another, being a refugee to contributing to the national economy or support your family and charity; being unknown to being famous; being the responsibility of another to taking own (personal) responsibility, being a school drop out to owning business knowledge and skills; being exposed to a criminal, discriminatory political or deprived social environment to being self-sustained; and being set back by circumstances to experiencing miracles.

It could be said that the participants in the current study also experienced similar concrete changes (for example, financially poor to financially comfortable; disabled to achieving internationally; seriously injured to competing internationally; being uneducated to being educated; being disadvantaged to becoming famous; etc.). The difference between the background stories and those of participants were in terms of the abstract changes. The current study would reveal what the media could not indicate without an in-depth study in interviewing subjects to specifically investigate possible abstract changes. The current study's value was in revealing that meaning assigned to the turning-point experience was an important indicator of the abstract changes taking place.

Although the rags to riches stories revealed extreme literal changes, which might have been inflated by media due to the wealth or fame involved, these subjects were once ordinary everyday people, who employed certain internal abstract aspects in their lives to move ahead and reach their high points.

In terms of culture, it was interesting also to note that the people belonging traditionally to a collectivistic culture were presenting the themes of support to others and strong family values more regularly, and those traditionally from individualistic cultures favoured the theme of taking a risk. Resilience and taking responsibility was equally represented in both cultures. It also seems that the non-whites presented the theme of hard work more regularly, and the subjects from an African and South African context had the strong mind-set (positive attitude) more in common with each other.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

Various known rags to riches cases have been mentioned to serve as background to the study's research participants' stories. Themes (although not determined through formal analysis) were presented based on information presented through the media's 'voice' and determined through intuitive analysis by the researcher. These themes, however, would not directly serve as triangulation for the themes emerging from the current study, but would mainly indirectly assist in understanding the themes of the study's participants in respect of providing contextual background. In comparing the current study's themes with those of the rags to riches stories, various similarities were found. Through analysis of the current study's themes, it was revealed that the combination of themes (as suggested through the constructed theme-model), were employed to move beyond the low points and reach the high points. The rags to riches stories also indicated that there were more than one theme present in the turning-point experiences, which were also internal in nature in most cases.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The previous chapters provided the conceptual and theoretical context for the current study. Chapter 1 presents a general introduction to the research topic, reasons why the current researcher was interested in studying turning-point experiences in individuals' lives, how these small life journeys are experienced, verbalised, and could assist in improving our own subjective QOL experience. Chapter 2 provides contextual information on the current researcher's interest in finding answers to an improved QOL, and how the chosen theoretical approach emerged through engagement with psychological theory. Chapter 3 provides the theoretical approach and framework for the current study (i.e. a phenomenological approach within positive psychological theory). Chapter 4 provides context, as well as global and local 'rags to riches' stories to assist the reader to understand and have a feel for the stories to come. Throughout these chapters, and in subsequent chapters, the conceptual context is continuously being formulated to provide understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. This chapter will explain the methodology used to conduct the current study in order to obtain the required information.

#### **5.2 Methodology and methods**

Methodology is defined as "a theory of how inquiry should proceed ... [i]t involves analysis of the assumptions, principles, and procedures in a particular approach to inquiry", while methods are seen as "a procedure, tool, or technique used by the inquirer to generate and analyse data" (Schwandt cited in Glesne, 2011, p. 14). In short, methods are the means to gather the data (Wagner et al., 2012). Methodology involves the processes to be followed to conduct the analysis and contains the methods to be used. It is therefore the design, strategy and plan to make use of a particular method or methods (Atlas-ti.com, 2016). Research methods are chosen for use in application of a certain methodology, or processes to follow, in order to obtain knowledge or data for answering the research question.

#### **5.3 Chapter structure**

In quantitative research, the structure of the methodological part of a study would typically include aspects such as: overview of the experiment/design; population/sample; location; restrictions/limiting conditions; procedures; materials; variables; and statistical treatment (Lynch, n.d.). In qualitative research, however, the methodology does not follow a typical conventional

structure. A typical methodology section of a qualitative research study could consist of the following: methodological framework; strategies for sampling, data gathering, research participants; ethical considerations; methods; and analysis processes (Liamputtong, 2013). Murcott (cited in Lynch, n.d.) suggests a few important questions that can be used as guidelines in structuring the researcher's qualitative methodology chapter such as: How did you go about your research; what overall strategy did you adopt and why; what design and techniques did you use; and why those and not others?

For the current study, the researcher decided upon a structure to include the following: background (i.e. research paradigm, approach, objectives and design); data collection (i.e. preparation, procedures, research instruments and participants - sample and sampling); analysis of texts (i.e. analysis methods, procedures and structure); contextualising the methodology (i.e. context, transferability, triangulation and trustworthiness); and ethical considerations. This structure is regarded as acceptable considering the qualitative nature of the study. Although the researcher followed an open-minded approach in gaining insight into the experiences of participants by following specific research methods, he would still maintain a certain logical flow of proceedings. To assist the reader, this chapter is presented by including elements of a traditional structure, as well as new elements, to reflect the logical sense and sequence of the proceedings that were followed. The current researcher intended to have a more flexible, but still rigorous, approach in constructing this chapter; and was influenced by Liamputtong (2013) and Murcott (cited in Lynch, n.d.) in determining the structure and content of this chapter.

### **5.3.1 Background**

In providing background to the type of, reasons for, aims and objectives of the current study, as well as the framework (i.e. paradigm and design) used to answer the research questions; relevant information will now be presented.

#### **5.3.1.1 Research paradigm**

Underlying the research methodology of a study is the philosophical or theoretical perspective of how the researcher views the world and understands reality (Atlasti.com, 2016; Hall, Griffiths & McKenna, 2013). This is generally known as the paradigm underlying the research project. According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2008), paradigms in research are defined as “models or frameworks that are derived from a worldview or belief system about the nature of knowledge and existence ... are shared by a scientific community and guide how a community of researchers act with regard to inquiry” (p. 1). Paradigms therefore influence our past, present and

future perspectives on reality. In summary, paradigms can be seen as the nature of the researcher's inquiry and her/his perspective on the knowledge that will be produced through the study (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006).

Interpretivism as a research paradigm developed from the work of philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and Edmund Husserl, who were idealists (Glesne, 2011). Idealists are known for believing “the world cannot exist independently of the mind – or ideas”, which is in contrast to the realists who believe that “the world exists independently of the knower” (p. 8). It is implied that scientists can only understand the world indirectly and this is accomplished through interpretation – interpreting the phenomenon, others and themselves by how it is perceived in their minds (Glesne, 2011). Interpretivists, however, understand that the reality explored does not happen independently of a context, and therefore considers phenomena in relation to the specific context in which it manifests.

Rossman and Rallis (2012) state that: “[h]umans are viewed as creators of their worlds” (pp. 43-44). Thus, to investigate a phenomenon from an interpretivist paradigm perspective, the researcher would make use of research methods of interacting with and talking to people, within their contexts, about their perceptions of the phenomenon (Glesne, 2011). The interpretivist approach includes focusing on the subjective experience of people, studying their social contexts, exploring the richness and complexity of their experiences in-depth and realizing that there are multiple realities associated with. Furthermore, the subjective experience and knowledge of the researcher influence her/his way of conducting the research, reaching conclusions and understanding what was investigated (Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012).

### **5.3.1.2 Research approach**

In following the interpretivist paradigm, the overall research approach to the current study is a qualitative research approach. Research implies cautiously and thoroughly searching for answers to specific research questions (Glesne, 2011). Qualitative research concerns itself with describing, analysing and interpreting what has been observed, as opposed to quantitative research that focuses on control and prediction (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). According to Nieuwenhuis and Smit (2012), qualitative research strives to “create a coherent story as it is seen through the eyes of those who are part of the story, to understand and represent their experiences and actions as they encounter, engage with, and live through situations” (p. 127). Normally, the researcher becomes the research instrument in obtaining an insider's perspective to explore at a deeper level (Nieuwenhuis & Smit,

2012). The **researcher as instrument** implies that data-collection, analysis and interpretation happen through the researcher as she/he engages with participants on a personal level.

Similar to quantitative research, qualitative research is also rooted in a certain paradigm or tradition (Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012). Qualitative research is about studying phenomena and therefore finds its roots in phenomenology, which is about studying lived experiences and interpreting them, often from a new or fresh **questioning** perspective (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Qualitative research differs from quantitative research whereby, in the latter, data is coded into numbers and, in the former, detail of the data as it is presented in true form, referred to as data integrity, is kept and coded to deliver themes (Durrheim, 2006). Therefore, qualitative research studies real people in-depth, focussing on the subjective experiences and considering the context within which the experiences take place (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Qualitative research can apply a variety of data-gathering techniques to gain in-depth insight into a phenomenon in order to fulfil its major strength, namely, to obtain “richness and depth of explorations and descriptions of data” (Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012, p. 126).

The current study was essentially qualitative in nature. It was supported by restricted or limited background data to partially assist with analysing, supporting and/or interpreting the qualitative responses along with self-drawn pictures (i.e. RoL drawings), as well as with analysis, confirmation and/or interpretation of responses and for adding to the contextual understanding of the participants’ experiences. The main use for the additional techniques however, was essentially for contextual understanding of the participants’ responses.

### **5.3.1.3 Research objectives**

The objectives or aims of a research study specify the focus (or scope) and purpose of the research (Visagie, 2010). It indicates what was investigated in the particular study through operationalisation of its focus (Van der Riet & Durrheim, 2006). Rossman and Rallis (2012) propose that the ultimate purpose of qualitative research is learning. In line with that, the overall purpose of this research study is to obtain basic information that could become applied knowledge. The primary aim of the current study is to interpret a specific social phenomenon as perceived from the viewpoint of the participants experiencing it (Glesne, 2011). The focus is the specific experiences of people moving from a low to a high point, as understood from their own subjective perspective.

The main objectives of the current research study are:

1. To understand what a turning-point experience was for the research participants ;

2. To determine what psychological and/or spiritual aspects were involved during this experience (determined through identifying of shared and unique themes);
3. To analyse and interpret the themes in order to offer an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of a turning-point experience;
4. To present a theme-model, based on the analysis of themes, which could be used as a suggestion to others in similar circumstances, enabling them to move from a low to a high point experience in their lives.

#### **5.3.1.4 Research design**

A research design focuses on how the researcher is going to address the research problem or answer the research question (Visagie, 2010). According to Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006), a research design is a “strategic framework or plan that guides research activity to ensure that sound conclusions are reached” (p. 563). The purpose of a research study determines the research design (Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012). In qualitative research designs, the purpose of the research is to explore, to describe, or to understand (Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012). Furthermore, the interpretivist paradigm perspective is to understand the experiences of participants from their own perspective and interpretation thereof. As a specific qualitative approach, the phenomenological approach focuses on “the meaning that certain lived experiences hold for participants” (Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012, p. 132). In order to determine the meaning of a phenomenon (in this case, an experience) according to the principles of phenomenology, one needs to obtain a full and complete description of the experience and through this description, overall meanings can be obtained (Moustakas cited in Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012). In phenomenology, what becomes important is the essence of the experience – to describe it and not to explain it. The current research study’s design consisted of a qualitative research design, following a phenomenological approach, with the purpose of exploring, describing and understanding the phenomenon of a turning-point experience as part of a person’s life story. The methods used in qualitative research studies, and therefore in the current study, for collection of data would include (personal) interviewing and (various) methods of obtaining themes through the analysis of texts or narratives (in this case, stories) (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006).

#### **5.3.2 Data collection**

The data collection procedures for the current study entailed the preparation, the procedures, the research instruments and participant sampling. This will now be discussed.

### 5.3.2.1 Preparation and procedures for data collection

In preparation for the data collection to take place, the current researcher identified and recruited potential research participants who were willing to participate in the study. However, before recruitment could commence, the research instruments had to be finalised, which meant the drafting of certain documents. The initial plan was to have three sessions with each participant: the first as an introduction to determine if a participant qualified and was prepared to participate; the second session to collect the data through the RoL drawing and conducting the interview afterwards; and the third session would be used to follow up, if necessary. In the end, except for the first two participants, only one session with each participant was held due to logistical and financial implications.

Data collection only commenced once the research instruments were finalised and participants were identified, approached and informed about the study by providing them with background information (See Appendix A). Participants were identified and recruited in two ways: firstly, through personal and workplace contacts, and secondly, through the gatekeeper organisation whose national and provincial representatives were approached by the researcher and they assisted him in recommending willing participants. Pre-arrangements were made telephonically with identified participants and sessions were set up. During the session, participants were confirmed as suitable candidates, informed consent was obtained, RoL drawings were made and interviews were conducted. The current researcher showed all participants his own RoL drawing as an example and before they started drawing, he gave a brief explanation of how it should be done (See Appendix C and E). Interviews started directly or shortly after the RoL drawings were made. The interviews were audio-recorded with permission from the participants and the same question was asked (i.e. read as it was typed) to all participants before they started telling their stories.

The research question was formally posed to all participants at the beginning of the interview as part of the introductory proceedings, and during the interview sessions, after completing their RoL drawings. For some research participants this was the formal way of starting the interview, while for others it followed from a relatively short discussion about the RoL drawings first. All participants were asked exactly the same question; it was read to all of them word-for-word, with brief explanations, synonyms and/or translations to Afrikaans where clarity was needed (See Appendix D). This was an open question and it was presupposed that it would take participants 30-60 minutes to answer or speak about the question, in other words, telling it to the researcher as a fairly **short life story** being a part of, or within, their bigger and longer complete life story. Additional possible questions or statements were developed beforehand to assist/guide the



researcher during the interview, in order to elicit talking or probing participants when they were reluctant to speak (See Appendix D). The researcher used these questions occasionally, mostly indirectly and in some adapted form. Ethical clearance for the study was provided by the Department of Psychology, Unisa. Ethical standards, as laid down by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) (i.e. *Guidelines on Ethical Rules*), as well as the University of South Africa (Unisa) (i.e. *Policy on Research Ethics*) were adhered to at all times (HPCSA, 2017; University of South Africa, 2016). Once data collection was done, data analysis commenced.

### 5.3.2.2 Research instruments for the study

The research instruments for this study consisted of the following:

- **River of Life (RoL) drawing.** The RoL drawing is a method of drawing used as part of workshops, programs and/or events as an information gathering, knowledge and history sharing, and/or program evaluating tool (Kstoolkit.org, 2013; Rosenthal, 1998; Trainings.350.org, n.d.). It has various uses, such as for personal introduction, project reviewing, reconciliation regarding different perceptions, as well as for planning purposes (Kstoolkit.org, 2013). It has been applied as a group exercise and evaluation tool within the context of the evaluation of a community health worker program (Rosenthal, 1998). Other uses for the RoL drawing is to help people tell stories about the past, present or future; introduce themselves; have fun, for example as an ice-breaker; or build a shared view from differences in perspectives (Kstoolkit.org, 2013). The researcher was not able to determine if this method have been used in previous research studies.

In this study, the RoL drawing method was used as an individual, not a group exercise (See Appendix C). Firstly, it functioned as an icebreaker to assist the participants to communicate their stories in a fun, creative and visualised way. Secondly, it was used as a personal reflection on their short life stories regarding their low and high point experiences. Thirdly, it was a means to assist the researcher to contextualise their stories, as well as an aid to help him understand what was said during the interviews. This exercise would help participants to open-up and tell their stories through a picture/drawing/graph (within the context of their bigger or total life-story) and to stimulate their memories about their experiences (Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012). The most relevant methodological reason in terms of the study for why participants were to create these drawings was to serve as a method of triangulation of the data obtained from the interviews.

- **Interviewing, recording and transcriptions.** One of the most frequently used methods of collecting qualitative information, is interviewing. Interviewing allows the researcher to directly interact with the participant and is more natural than completing a questionnaire (Kelly, 2006b). Interviewing in this study took the form of an unstructured, open interview. Although one structured research question was asked to all participants, it was an open question that elicited open and unique responses (See Appendix D). This question was asked in the beginning of the interview session, while other questions (unstructured or semi-structured – as in the case of the pre-determined guiding questions mentioned earlier) were asked when necessary and for probing during the interview session. The duration of interviews differed from participant to participant. All interviews were audio-recorded and afterwards transcribed professionally by a transcriber. The researcher checked the quality of each interview himself by listening to each recorded interview, checking the transcribed data, and editing where necessary (See Appendix G for participants' transcripts).

Structured interviewing follows a structured format, consisting of a list of predetermined and standard questions, but unstructured interviewing, used in this study, does not adhere to a fixed structure, although the interviewer could use certain guiding questions covering some core concepts (Trochim, 2006; Visagie, 2010). Unstructured interviews are particularly useful when exploring a topic broadly, and also for obtaining in-depth information and understanding of participants' feelings and experiences (Kelly 2006b). Open-ended questions are mostly used and respondents are encouraged to be open and express themselves in their own way (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The disadvantage of unstructured interviewing is that due to the uniqueness of each interview, especially when no predetermined set of questions are used, collected data is usually more difficult to analyse, especially when synthesizing data from different participants (Trochim, 2006).

- **Short background information questionnaire (SBIQ).** A short questionnaire was designed to be included during the interview session with all participants. This questionnaire consisted of three demographic questions regarding age, race, current job/appointment; four closed questions regarding various rating scales on happiness, religiousness, personal status, perseverance, caring, giving, positive attitude, general QOL); and one open-ended qualitative question regarding personal understanding of the concept of QOL (See Appendix D). The questionnaire was completed by participants

only after the unstructured interview ended, the reason being not to influence their stories with the concepts used therein.

The main aim of the questionnaire was to assist the researcher with contextualising, and later understanding and interpretation, of the findings of the study. From the onset of the research it was never intended to be formally analysed, as a limited number of participants were used, therefore generalisation of findings would be problematic. Furthermore, the study's design is not a mixed-methods design, but purely qualitative. Although, the current researcher would not formally and quantitatively analyse this data, he would consider it as information helping him to contextually interpret and understand the findings as a further method to triangulate the data.

- **Researcher notes and other information.** The researcher continuously made short notes on various aspects regarding observations he made during the data collection phase of the study. For example, short notes were made regarding non-verbal behaviour of participants, reflections regarding own behaviour, subjective thoughts or feelings about participants, environmental aspects, duration-of-interview-times and any other observations that the researcher deemed to be important or interesting. Unfortunately, but as a precaution not to hinder participants, notes were not taken during the interview. Per occasion, the researcher also wrote more detailed paragraphs reflecting on the study, including his thoughts and feelings with regard to himself in relation to the current study and/or participants. Notes were also made when transcripts were read and re-read during initial analysis. The information obtained from the notes was mainly integrated throughout the process of analysis and used for contextualisation and interpretation of the data to ensure in-depth and improved understanding of participants' experiences. In a similar fashion, other additional information, such as information provided through the gatekeeper organisation, formal and other documents pertaining to participants, like participant profiles and achievements, and information known to the current researcher, for example personal knowledge about certain participants, were used during analysis to contextualise and provide more in-depth understanding.

### **5.3.2.3 Research participants: Sample and sampling**

In qualitative studies, samples are rarely randomly selected. Especially in the case of studying a specific and/or rare phenomenon, which might not be commonly found or evenly distributed throughout the population, the researcher may have to use a conveniently available and appropriate

or opportunistic sample (Kelly, 2006b). According to Kelly (2006b), the size of the sample depends on the nature of the questions asked (general or specific), the sample (homogeneous or heterogeneous) and saturation (the point where sufficient information obtained is reached). In the current study, a homogeneous sample was used, meaning the participants shared similar experiences, and saturation was met when additional participants no longer provided new or challenging information or added considerably to the emerged themes. The sample size was therefore adequate.

Sampling in the current study was non-random, convenient, but also purposive. The current researcher first approached people known to him, such as work colleagues and friends, who he thought might know potential participants and they were able to refer him to a few available and accessible participants. He also approached a certain gatekeeper organisation (an empowerment/outreach organisation) through a work colleague – the organisation then identified certain potential participants on his behalf. Once identified, and in the case of the empowerment/outreach organisation, with participants' permission, he then contacted them in person, telephonically introduced himself and the nature of the study, confirmed they were indeed suitable candidates and arranged a session to meet with them. Participants were all provided with the introduction letter prior to data collection, either via email, via the gatekeeper organisation or in person by the current researcher himself. Participants were thereby selected purposefully in respect of the specific phenomenon to be investigated, namely the experience of having moved beyond a significant low point towards, and reaching a significant high point thereafter.

Although the sample itself was homogeneous, or similar, in terms of the phenomenon investigated, it was heterogeneous in terms of gender, age and race. The current researcher sought to obtain the perspective of South African participants across the provinces of the country, not limited to a specific area or only one province within South Africa. He required a wider perspective on the phenomenon under study (Dissertation.laerd.com, 2012). He therefore decided to use a bigger sample of between ten to twenty participants, to obtain more detailed information. This would enable him to compare more individuals, spread across areas, with each other. Although interview duration was fairly short (on average  $\pm$  30 minutes), sufficient information was obtained from participants. The sample of this study comprised nineteen South African participants from across South Africa.

The formal sample criteria for inclusion into the study's sample group were that participants had to:

1. Have reached a significant high (QOL) point at least at any one time in their lives;
2. Deem and define in their own words that they regard this point(s) as significant and a high or positive (QOL) point in their lives;
3. Come from a situation, prior to reaching such a significant high point in their lives, that were dire, deemed as such and supported through their own words as a significant low or negative QOL point in the past; and
4. Be permanent residents and citizens of South Africa.

### **5.3.3 Analysis of texts**

The unit of analysis in social research studies refers to “the WHAT of your study: what object, phenomenon, entity, process, or event you are interested in investigating” (Babbie & Mouton, 2006, p. 84). Typically the object in human sciences would be people. In the current research study a phenomenon was studied, namely people's turning-point experiences. Technically then, the unit of analysis would be the individual participant's stories about this experience, which were recorded and then transcribed as text.

In qualitative research, qualitative analysis is the “non-numerical examination and interpretations of observations for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships” (Babbie & Mouton, 2006, p. 646). From the phenomenological viewpoint, data analysis focuses on “**what** participants experienced and **how** they experienced it” (accentuation added, Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012, p. 132). According to Nieuwenhuis and Smit 2012), in social studies where phenomenology is applied, the researcher often starts with an in-depth investigation of one individual's experience of a phenomenon, then moves towards investigating others' experiences, where after he interprets the phenomenon's underlying meaning and structure, based on participants' combined and shared descriptions.

As indicated earlier, individual interviewing was the main method of data collection. For analysing the data, the main technique applied was the thematic analysis technique (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). Coding, categorisation and theme identification took place. Computer software programs were utilised to assist the current researcher in analysing the data. Various sources of data were used to complete the analysis process. Participants verbalised their experiences through their stories during the interview and then provided their own unique RoL drawings, functioning as visual representations of their stories. This non-textual data was taken into consideration with the analysis

of interview data (the transcribed texts), mainly for the enrichment of data and enhanced contextual interpretation and understanding. Other sources of textual data included researcher observational notes, personal reflections, SBIQ responses (background information), any additional relevant written or verbal information obtained from gatekeepers or from personal knowledge, reviewed literature, and related background rags to riches stories.

The information obtained from the various instruments mentioned above, was integrated to enrich interview data, contextualise and improve the quality of responses. Consequently, after the integration of information, it was triangulated with information obtained from other sources, such as the background stories, researcher reflections and comments, as well as reviewed literature to present a final representation of the relevant phenomenon.

#### **5.3.3.1 Analysis methods**

After data collection was completed, the current researcher started to analyse interview transcript information by applying the thematic analysis method. He used computer software programs, namely Microsoft Office Word 2010 and Microsoft Office Excel 2010, as well as hard copies of the transcripts to perform the analysis. The constant comparative analysis technique was not followed, as this method would have required continuous analysis while collecting the data and (if necessary) additional follow-up sessions, which were unfeasible due to logistical challenges (location and availability of participants), time delay and constraints (time lapsing between first and second time stories, exclusion of certain participants and travel time to participants) and cost (mostly transport).

According to Kawulich and Holland (2012), the choice of data analysis “depends upon the theoretical framework, the purpose of the study, and your intentions in conducting the study” (p. 229). Analysis of data is also determined by the approach to reasoning, which is either deductive or inductive. The current study follows an interpretive phenomenological approach to understanding human experiences through applying inductive reasoning. Thematic analysis entails analysing data by themes and is highly inductive (Dawson, 2006). Themes or patterns are identified in the data (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). The researcher does not impose themes, but allows the themes to emerge from the data (Dawson, 2002). The main research question, along with related sub-questions, guides the researcher to identify themes that will provide answers (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). From the phenomenological approach perspective, the purpose of the answers is to understand the phenomenon (in this study, the experiences of participants) under study. Normally, thematic analysis entails data collection and analysis taking place simultaneously (Dawson, 2002).

In the current study, the researcher decided to let the themes emerge first from the individual transcripts separately and uniquely, without preconceived conceptions.

Although the content of the texts was analysed, the method used was not strictly spoken content analysis. In pure content analysis a more rigid or systematic form of coding takes place and sometimes pre-existing codes are used to identify codes in the text (Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013). This is more likely to occur in qualitative studies using deductive reasoning. In the current study, a very inductive approach was followed in developing codes from the presented data itself. When the phenomenological approach is used in a qualitative research study, the aim would typically be to “give an account of what all research participants share in common as they experience the same phenomenon (Kawulich & Holland, 2012, p. 238). The purpose of the current study was to explore and identify the psychological and/or spiritual aspects utilised by participants to move from a significant low point to a significant high point, therefore, the phenomenon of the turning-point experience as presented through common/shared and unique themes. Thematic analysis was the most appropriate method of analysis for this purpose.

#### **5.3.3.2 Analysis procedures**

In qualitative studies the procedures for data analysis vary. Analysis in qualitative research studies can be either ongoing or conducted once data gathering has ended. Some authors believe it is an ongoing process commencing even from the start (from framing the research questions) (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Procedures are also normally more flexible than the procedures followed in quantitative research. For Ellingson (2011), analysis of data is seen as “the process of separating aggregated texts (oral, written, or visual) into smaller segments of meaning for close consideration, reflection, and interpretation” (p. 595). According to Rossman and Rallis (2012), analysing and interpreting qualitative data is a complex process wherein meaning is assigned to data. It involves certain activities, namely **immersion** (getting to know the data); **analysis** (arranging the data into chunks); and **interpretation** (assigning meaning to the chunks of data).

The analysis of data was only conducted after the collection phase was completed. The reasons for this were that the current researcher focussed on building a strong interviewer-interviewee relationship within the context of a new/fresh relationship; probed participants to contribute as much information of their own as possible; tried not to intimidate them in any manner so they could speak as freely and openly as possible; and gathered as much unique information as possible, withholding his own subjective interpretations in allowing the data (participants’ stories) to speak for itself.

Transcription of interview data was professionally done by a qualified transcriber and quality checking thereof was conducted afterwards by the current researcher himself. Transcriptions were captured in Microsoft Word format and hardcopies were printed. While quality checking was performed, notes were made on the hardcopies. During the first round of analysis, the current researcher immersed himself into each individual transcript interview (text) to get to know the data (the story of the participant, her/his background, low point experience, high point experience, and turning-point experience). The transcripts were read and re-read many times during the whole data analysis phase to get to know the participants' experiences.

During this phase, also using Microsoft Word, the text concerning the low points, high point and turning-points were separated for each individual interview transcript by using three different colour markers, using Text Highlight Colour in Microsoft Word. The current research study was mainly interested in the turning-point experience part (i.e. moving from/beyond the low point to the high point), while the other two parts provided the context within which the turning-point would be understood, as well as evidence of the significance of the experiences for the participants. Rich information was often provided by participants' descriptions of their low and high points, but this was not the main focus of the research study.

During the first round of analysis, each individual interview transcript was considered separately from the others and analysed in detail by assigning codes, categories and themes. During the second round of analysis, after each individual's transcript was analysed, emerged themes were compared across participants to identify and separate main common (shared) themes and unique (individual or not shared by many) themes. According to Kelly (2006b), saturation is reached when "there is a sense that the theoretical account is nearing a complete and adequate form ... further information becomes increasingly redundant, to the extent that it becomes repetitive" (p. 289). It was noted that a saturation point was reached in terms of common themes being adequately repeated, and unique themes not.

In the final analysis, the emerged themes from the total group of participants were re-worked to present an integrated **theme-model** of themes. Pre-existing themes or concepts existing in literature, background stories and the other sources of information, mentioned before to assist in the finalisation of the model, were considered and incorporated through integration (i.e. triangulation). During this last phase, contextualising and interpretation to enhance understanding of the experiences of participants also took place.



### 5.3.3.3 Compiling an analysis structure

- **Units of analysis.** Participants' verbal stories were translated to written text. The main parts of the texts to be analysed were those parts containing each participant's turning-point experience. The main aim of the analysis process was to identify the themes, which would describe the psychological and/or spiritual aspects that were present and utilised in the participants' lives when they managed to move from their low to their high point. This part in each interview was sub-divided into units of analysis, which, according to Kawulich and Holland (2012), can be "a word, a phrase, a sentence, or a couple of sentences" (p. 231).

In the current study, the units of analysis were mainly a couple of sentences which, when considered together, formed a unit due to the way the words were used in the sentences and conveyed a singular idea or covered a specific subject. In other words, the topic or idea was contained within the words of the sentence in terms of how, together, they formed a unit. The number of sentences was chosen through analysing the text line-by-line. Each unit of analysis was then assigned a topic or label to indicate what the subject of the unit was.

- **Codes.** Coding helps to organise and structure the data and to conceptualise it (Visagie, 2010). According to Struwig and Stead (cited in Visagie, 2010) codes are defined as "labels that assign units of meaning to the information obtained" (p. 113). When analysing the content of a piece of data, one could either look at the manifest content or the latent content (Babbie & Mouton, 2006). Qualitative research is more prone to look at the latent content. Typically, coding will then be based on assigning codes to the underlying (latent) meanings contained in the data. In the current study, the main approach to coding the content of the interviews was to expose the latent meanings in the units of analysis. Normally, initial coding takes place after which a more in-depth analysis reveals similar core meanings of codes that can be grouped together into categories (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). Coding may also start by being very descriptive and later on become more integrated (Willig, 2001). Codes can be descriptive in nature, indicating what is being discussed, or interpretive, indicating what the underlying meaning is. Although initial codes in this study were both descriptive and interpretive, codes were essentially interpretive in the end.

The researcher started to code the data for one interview at a time. Coding took place through utilising the Microsoft Excel program. After the units of analysis were identified and topics assigned, the researcher analysed these units or sentences containing the topics and labelled them with codes, which were initially descriptive and interpretive. After re-analysing the codes and re-labelling them to only have interpretive codes, the codes contained the latent meaning of the units of analysis. Meanings were inductively and interpretively identified by the researcher. Codes were then compared with each other within one interview, to see if some of them could be collapsed (for example codes having similar meanings) and/or some could be changed in order to be more effective (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). A code scheme for each interview was then compiled. Once each code scheme was compiled, these final codes for the individual interview were grouped into categories of meaning and then later on transformed to form the emerging themes for each participant.

- **Categories:** Categories are identified through coding and therefore consist of the grouping of codes. Code groupings are also called “categories of meaning” (Kawulich & Holland, 2012, p. 233). Similar meanings obtained through codes are grouped together to form categories (Visagie, 2010). Categories contain essential features that are shared within the code grouping (Willig, 2001). Once code schemes were finalised, the codes were analysed in terms of how they could be grouped together to form categories. Reading and re-reading of the text helped to identify similar meaning codes (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). From the initial coding, after more in-depth analysis, similar core meaning codes were grouped together into categories. Categorising took place for each individual interview.

According to Merriam (cited in Kawulich & Holland, 2012) the “selection of categories is intuitive and should reflect the purpose of the research questions” (p. 233). The following criteria are also identified: categories should be exhaustive (contain important pieces of data); be mutually exclusive (have only one category for each piece of data); reflect their content; and be conceptually congruent (represent the same concept). In categorising the data, the current researcher identified similarities as well as differences in the data (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Differences would also help to identify and/or confirm categories. Broad categories were compiled – these categories would later be re-analysed or refined in terms of becoming a theme on its own, or, grouped together with others before becoming a theme. Categorising initially started with descriptive coding,

then interpretive coding, which in the end became more in-depth with the identification and labelling of the themes. As a result, each individual participant would have been assigned their themes.

- **Themes.** Identifying themes and patterns is the main function of thematic analysis and is made possible through the coding process (Glesne, 2011; Kawulich & Holland, 2012). The themes were derived from the categories of meaning obtained through the coding process. During the process of forming themes from the categories for each participant, additional applicable information obtained from the research notes, comments and observations during the interview, as well as supporting information obtained from the RoL drawings, were incorporated. After each individual's themes were identified, themes were compared across different individuals. Comparisons would take place in the sequence of how interviews were conducted. The themes from the different interviews would constitute the universal themes.

This round of analysis constituted a more in-depth analysis of the texts. Themes were compared in terms of similarities and differences, as well as in terms of occurrence. Themes that were repeated between participants were then identified, while some unique themes remained. Those that were commonly presented (emerged with most participants) were deemed main or common (shared themes), while themes that were only presented with a few participants and not commonly shared with others, were deemed unique themes. During the final analysis, themes were either confirmed or adapted and re-labelled in respect of having similar meanings, taking the theoretical framework perspective and the other sources of information (RoL drawing, researcher notes, background stories, SBIQ, etc.) into consideration. To finalise the themes from the total group of participants' integrated information, how themes were to be labelled and compiled into the current study's theme-model, was considered.

In other words, themes emerging from each participant's turning-point experience were compared with other participants' themes, which were also compared with themes from reviewed literature and theoretical background information, as well as themes identified from the rags to riches background stories (triangulation). During comparison, themes were adapted or changed and re-labelled to form main/common and unique themes. After the themes were contextualised as described earlier, they finally served as the means to describe and understand the experiences of participants, as well as provide an answer to

the study's research question concerning the aspects involved during the turning-point experience.

- **Concluding analysis.** The RoL drawings were interpretively (not in-depth) analysed in support of the main qualitative information obtained from the interviews. Additional information from the researcher notes, observations and reflections, background stories and literature were also incorporated during the final stages of analysis to present detailed discoveries and findings. The ratings and qualitative question responses in the SBIQ were incorporated into the interpretation of findings, while the presented demographical information contributed to the contextual understanding of the participants' stories. The RoL drawings were also used for this purpose, and along with the rags to riches background stories, further contributed to additional understanding of the meanings of the themes identified in the current study. Certain descriptive information was useful in supporting the findings and drawing of conclusions for the study. In the final report, results were combined, integrated, triangulated and interpreted within the positive psychology theoretical framework and finally commented upon in terms of QOL.

## **5.4 Contextualising the methodology**

### **5.4.1 Context**

From the interpretive perspective, what is very important is “**understanding in context**” (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 274). According to them, to understand entails “the meaning of a written text would be established through piecing together the context of the text's creation and thereby recreating the meaning of the author's words” (p. 274). One looks at the person's experience(s) relative to the context in which they take place through consideration of the words, actions and the constructions she/he makes. From the social constructionist point of view, the context would also include the larger social constructions or discourses surrounding the individual's experiences and how this has an effect on the person. Within the phenomenological paradigm, the focus is on the personal and social contexts immediately surrounding the individual, to assist the researcher in understanding the lived experiences (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

The current researcher used additional methods to provide the contextual information required. This included the RoL drawings, researcher notes, personal reflections, SBIQ and any other additional information provided by the gatekeeper organisation or documents made available by sources, such as personal communication and the internet, for example the organisation's website and social media. The current researcher's context was the phenomenological approach and positive

psychology theoretical framework. He would however, **bracket** his theoretical context for the sake of the participants' contexts during the data collection phase. This implied careful listening to what was said, postponing any judgements and focusing on the phenomenon at hand (Terre Blanche et al., 2006)

Although, in interpretive qualitative (and phenomenological) studies, the researcher's subjectivity plays an important role in understanding the phenomenon of the experiences of the participants, the current researcher was intentionally set, during the RoL drawing and interview sessions, on allowing the participants to express themselves freely. The theoretical context was only brought into consideration after the data collection stage and during the data analysis phase. This was done to ensure that the individual **voices or stories** may be heard as open and unrestricted as possible. Glesne (2011) proposes that a researcher creates a conceptual context for a study, instead of reviewing the literature. The intention is that the researcher rather focuses on the phenomenon being studied, and not be driven by theory.

During the first two phases of data analysis, bracketing also took place in respect of preconceived expectations that the low, turning and high points are specific points, that these three points followed each other rigidly in terms of a timeline, and that the low point is supposedly totally resolved before a high point can be reached. The researcher did however at certain occasions during the interviews probe some participants to determine if they indeed had experienced a specific turning-point. Bracketing also was maintained until the second part of the analysis phase in terms of not looking for pre-existing themes (for example themes from literature or rags to riches background stories) to avoid influencing the **uniqueness** of the individual participant's stories and experiences. Finally, bracketing, in terms of the context relating to each participant, was also pursued during data collection by not considering participants' gender, race, age, residence in a certain geographic area or specific cultural background.

Rossmann and Rallis (2012) suggest the use of a holistic strategy in analysing qualitative data. One should look for connections among the data, taking the actual context of the data into consideration. One uses a holistic strategy if one wants to "capture a person's experience in a setting", and this provides the researcher with an opportunity to form a "narrative portrait" of the person (p. 268). In the current study, each interview was at first analysed individually and thereafter compared to others. Each story had its own unique context. The specific phenomenon of having a turning-point experience, happened within the participant's **story-context** – between a low point and a high point. The context of the phenomenon as experienced by each individual was determined through the experience starting within the low point and then ending with the high point. In other words, the

current researcher considered and took into account the information provided by their low and high points experiences to understand the context of their turning-point experiences.

#### **5.4.2 Transferability**

Representativeness is an important part of quantitative research as its ultimate is to generalise findings to the general population, but this can be an issue in qualitative research (Willig, 2001). Generalisability refers to the “extent to which the interpretive account can be applied to other contexts than the one being researched” (Kelly, 2006a, p. 381). Representativeness becomes problematic in qualitative research studies when a study is investigating a certain phenomenon that is applicable to other people outside the study (Willig, 2001). In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research focuses on understanding a phenomenon and its meaning, rather than being able to draw conclusions from a sample and generalise it to a population (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). The current researcher used two methods to validate transferring or generalising the current study’s findings to similar other individuals and contexts, namely transferability and triangulation. Transferability in a qualitative research study can be defined as “the extent to which the findings can be applied in other contexts or with other respondents” (Babbie & Mouton, 2006, p. 277). Due to the contextual nature of qualitative studies, generalisability of findings is limited (Kelly, 2006a).

According to Guba and Lincoln (cited in Babbie & Mouton, 2006), two strategies for transferability can be followed, namely **thick (rich) description** and **purposive sampling**. Thick description refers to accumulating adequately detailed descriptions of the information within the context it was provided, and then, accurately reporting on it. When using the strategy of purposive sampling, the researcher purposefully selects participants who are more likely to have the required information about the specific phenomenon to be investigated and then maximise the range of the information within that context, by selecting participants that differ from one another (Babbie & Mouton, 2006; Visagie, 2010). The current researcher purposefully selected participants who had experienced the same phenomenon, but came from different backgrounds, resided in different places and differed in terms of gender, age and race. Thick descriptions of their experiences were also accumulated. Another way of allowing for the application of transferability is making use of triangulation.

#### **5.4.3 Triangulation**

Triangulation refers to the strategies that can be followed to ensure that the presented findings are credible (trustworthy and reliable) and authentic (true) (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). Triangulation is useful in assuring that the study’s validity and reliability is enhanced (Babbie & Mouton, 2006). According to Kelly (2006b), triangulation involves utilising as many different applicable

information resources and means of gathering information as possible. Kawulich and Holland (2012) also iterate that to increase trustworthiness and the validity of findings, triangulation should include the use of different strategies or methods measuring the same phenomenon. Triangulation involves either combining two or more theories, information resources, methods, or researchers in the study on a particular phenomenon.

Denzin (cited in Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012) identified four types of triangulation, namely, **theoretical triangulation** (using multiple theoretical positions for interpretation); **data triangulation** (using multiple sources of data and sampling techniques); **methodological triangulation** (using multiple ways and methods for gathering data); and **investigator triangulation** (using multiple investigators or observers for data gathering, understanding and interpretation). Kelly (2006a) mentions a fifth type triangulation called **interdisciplinary triangulation** (using findings of multiple disciplines). The advantages of using triangulation include increasing validity, improving understanding, increased completeness, and confirmation (Kelly, 2006b; Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012). The use of multiple methods can assist in verifying results and findings by either agreeing with them and/or not contradicting them (Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012).

In this study, data and methodological triangulation took place by adding data obtained from additional sources (RoL drawings, SBIQ and researcher notes) to the main source of data, namely the transcribed interviews. The different sources of data served as a means of allowing greater potential to generalise or transfer results and findings further on. Through triangulation, the researcher could enhance transferability along with the other two strategies mentioned. In triangulating the themes in the study with themes/concepts identified through literature (theoretical framework), background stories and the other sources of information, the description of the findings was improved. An important consideration in applying triangulation was that the current researcher had to be able to relate the information provided from all the different methods and sources to one another during the analysis phase until the final writing up of the findings (Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012).

#### **5.4.4 Trustworthiness**

While quantitative research uses the terms ‘reliability and validity’ to refer to the consistency of findings, qualitative research uses the term ‘trustworthiness’ (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). Trustworthiness is dependent on the credibility (or truthfulness) of the study (Babbie & Mouton, 2006). According to Babbie and Mouton, various factors can contribute to credibility, such as

continued or prolonged engagement; persistent observation; triangulation; referential adequacy; peer debriefing; and member checks. The researcher pursued credibility of the current study through continued engagement (obtaining information until saturation occurred), triangulation with other sources of data, and referential adequacy (checking if the phenomenon under study was sufficiently referenced in other sources and ensuring the study was a worthy study). One way of ensuring trustworthiness and credibility in qualitative research is to use more than one data collection method (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). Another way would be to ensure that unobtrusive measures are used. This entails not disturbing or influencing the environment, situation, or natural setting in which the phenomenon is being studied (Kawulich & Holland, 2012).

In the current study, it was not possible to collect the data within the natural setting where it occurred. There were different time lapses for each participant for when they were in their low point experience, their high point experience or their turning-point experience. As the main focus was on the turning-point experience, the researcher primarily had to rely on participants' memories and their interpretations and/or final conclusions regarding their experiences. The data collection situations varied, but, as far as possible, the settings for each were similar in certain ways. The RoL drawings and interviews were conducted at a table and on almost all occasions, except once, the setting was relatively quiet without any disturbances. Various sources of data collection were used to enhance trustworthiness.

To further enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, the current researcher gave detailed descriptions of the procedures followed to reach his findings and presented the findings in rich or thick description format. This included quotes and other data to confirm the authenticity of findings. The quotes from the participants served as proof that the findings were essentially based on what emerged from the participants' stories. Triangulation, for enhancing the trustworthiness of the current study's findings, took place during the analysis process (integrating the various forms of data collected, contextualising information obtained, and triangulating information with various techniques and information provided by other sources and in literature).

### **5.5 Ethical considerations**

In all research, ethical considerations play a very important role. Ethics firstly concerns the welfare of participants, but it also extends to the methodology of the research project (Wassenaar, 2006). The current researcher was determined to adhere strictly to ethical principles throughout the study. Wassenaar (2006) identified four basic ethical principles, namely, **autonomy** (respect for the dignity of others); **non-maleficence** (no harm to participants either directly or indirectly as a result



of the research); **beneficence** (attempting to enhance the benefits that the research can offer participants); and **justice** (treat participants with fairness and equity at all times). In the current study, the current researcher adhered strictly to the principle of treating the data with the highest confidentiality. This would be in accordance with the ethical principles of autonomy and non-maleficence, to ensure the participants were protected and no harm would come to them. To ensure further non-maleficence to participants, since some of the low point experiences could be hurtful during the re-telling of their stories, the researcher was highly sensitive to be aware of any harmful negative issues to surface, and if any signs presented themselves, would stop the research process to avoid situations of participants re-living hurtful experiences. In case professional help would have been required, the researcher offered assistance in this regard, which was indicated in the informed consent form.

All participants were adults and voluntarily agreed to participate by signing an informed consent form (See Appendix B). Through this form, they were also made aware of their rights, any possible harm (although not foreseen), as well as possible professional support they could expect. Confidentiality (or the protection of the identity of participants) was further achieved by using pseudonyms instead of participants' real names. Some preferred their real names, but in the end, the researcher used pseudonyms for all participants. The use of pseudonyms does not guarantee total anonymity; therefore, the current researcher pursued additional measures to ensure that participants would not be recognised by others, for instance, people who know them, who are in their community or working with them (Ogletree & Kawulich, 2012). Such measures included paying attention to how participants were described and/or quoted in the final report, omitting any personal identifiable information and not providing too much descriptive information about the community or context, for example sport area, they are from, so, as to ensure further non-identification (Ogletree & Kawulich, 2012).

Participants were provided with sufficient information to indicate the current researcher's commitment towards adhering to ethical conduct during and after the collection of data, by informing them about their rights before obtaining their voluntary consent, offering support and the protection of their identities and treating information obtained with the necessary integrity, respect and strict confidentiality to ensure complete trust. In obtaining their trust, the researcher expected honest and trustworthy information, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of findings. Raw information was only seen by the transcriber (who formally undertook to adhere to the confidentiality principle, while participants' real names were still unknown to her) and the current researcher. The only other person, who rightfully had access to it, was the research study

supervisor. Data was secured on a computer, which was password protected and kept daily within a safe place behind locked doors. Other raw data (in documented form), such as the completed consent, introduction/agreement forms and SBIQ, as well as the RoL drawings, were also kept safe by being locked away.

Participants were informed through the informed consent form about possible benefits to them or the society regarding their participation (See Appendix B). Introductory background information about the study was also verbally provided to them during the interview sessions. Justice, or treating the participants with fairness, was adhered to all the times. They were respected for their opinion, and their perceptions were considered ultimately important in the current study, as this was the focus of the research. Ethics may have additional concerns in qualitative research, such as the issue of power or the researcher's position in the study and in relation to the participants (Wassenaar, 2006). The current researcher positioned himself as a humble and empathetic person, who was well mannered, friendly and open towards participants, listening to them attentively from a position where he required information from them, and that their point of view (their own words) were extremely important. There was no indication of any participants being adversely affected or directly/indirectly harmed by the study.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

This chapter explained the type of study the current researcher decided upon, as well as how he went about to conduct the current study, describing the methods and methodology used. This study's design focussed mainly on people, their perceptions and their stories conveying their experiences. Participants of the study were selected people from South Africa who had to face negative challenges within their lives. They were a diverse group of people who willingly told their stories on how they experienced moving beyond a low point towards a high point during their life. In this chapter it was explained how the current study was designed, how data was collected and analysed; how the methods and processes were trustworthy and beneficial; and how it adhered to ethical standards. In the next chapter, the findings of the study regarding the individual participant's stories will be discussed.

## CHAPTER SIX

### PARTICIPANTS' UNIQUE STORIES

#### 6.1 Introduction

The findings of the study will be presented in this chapter. The participants' stories are the most important part of the study, as these stories provide the findings of the study in the form of the psychological and/or spiritual factors used by participants to effect change in their lives. Each participant's story will be presented individually at first. It should be noted that these findings are a result of the analysis process that was followed and in this chapter, the findings up to phase two of this process will be discussed. During phase two, the in-depth phase of the analysis, information gathered through the RoL drawings, short background information questionnaire (SBIQ), researcher notes, observations, other information provided by the gatekeeper organisation or information known to the researcher, and/or any other applicable information, excluding literature and rich background story information, were combined with the primary interview transcript information. To obtain a context for their stories, participants were asked to elaborate on their low as well as high points. In addition to the context that was provided by detailing the two or more points, participants were requested to provide information regarding the 'change' experience, or turning-point, from the low to the high point. This information would then provide the detail concerning the main focus of the study: the aspects that enabled the participants to turn their situation around so that they were able to experience a high following a low.

In this study, the researcher used pseudonyms for each participant to protect their identity and left out or did not specify certain identifying information. The researcher confirmed with all participants beforehand that they were suitable candidates, willing to participate in the study and obtained their consent. Thereafter the official proceedings, namely the RoL drawings and interviews, commenced. All participants were allowed to finish the RoL drawings at their own pace, and the duration of the interviews were predominantly determined by their willingness to talk. Before commencing with their stories during the interview session, the researcher read the open research question out loud to each participant: "In your own words can you please describe your significant – which can mean noteworthy or important – low point in your life along with the significant high point in life experience and the aspects that you thought, felt, said, did and/or believed to move you from or past the low to the high point".

The participants were comfortable to start talking about their low points (a point in the past) and could continue to talk about their high points. Although each story was **unique**, the sequence in

which stories were told was mostly similar with a few differences arising. Not all stories had a specific-point-in-time low point as viewed in retrospect, by the participants, but through closer inspection and analysis it could be determined that all participants experienced a significant low. Such low point/s were also intensely experienced by each participant. Similarly, not all participants necessarily had a definitively-achieved specific-point-in-time high point and some participants indicated that it was still in progress. By closer inspection and through analysis it could be determined that all participants experienced a significant high in comparison with their past low point/s. In addition, not all stories had only one clearly defined low point and/or only one clearly defined high point; although the defining of these points as such would be from the participant's perspective. However, these variances were regarded as trivial and non-essential and therefore if more than one low and/or high point were experienced it would be regarded as a low and high point in general.

Each story presented will consist of **background information; summary of each individual participant's story** (from the researcher's perspective); **RoL drawing and SBIQ information**; and **discussion of themes** (i.e. containing the main or dominant and/or sub- or support themes with supporting sentences/phrases linked to the turning-point experience and regarded as the aspects that enabled the participant to move from the low to the high point/s). Specific contextual aspects that emerged from the interviews, which could shed more light on the themes; provided as well as from information provided through the RoL drawing; background questions; researcher notes and other additional information provided; and researcher comments (i.e. additional comments and reflection by the researcher) were integrated where applicable. A summary of each participant's themes are provided as appendices (See Appendix H).

## **6.2 Participant stories**

### **6.2.1 Participant 1: MJ**

#### **6.2.1.1 Background information**

MJ was referred by a work colleague who was familiar with the researcher's studies and who recommended the participant as a person who had a success story to tell and who was willing to share it. He was very open and willing and agreed to participate in telling his story. At the end of the interview, MJ indicated that he was still providing for his family and even for other people. It seemed important to him to give to other people.

### 6.2.1.2 Summary of MJ's story

MJ is a 30 year old African male who is employed as an assessment officer. He suffered two setbacks; first losing his father and then his mother. As a family, he and his siblings were exposed to very poor conditions during their upbringing. His lowest point was his mother's death on the day that he acquired a job shortly after finishing school. His mother, being sick, did prepare her children for her passing, but it still came as a shock to him. He also lost a sister and a brother during his life, and since his mother's death, he had to provide support to his younger siblings. His highs were finishing school, obtaining a job and being able to provide for his family up to today. He has managed to overcome negative circumstances in his life, was able to forgive those he had to forgive, and is now able to sustain himself financially and also provide for others, even beyond his immediate family. He reaches out to society, is financially comfortable and has inner peace.

### 6.2.1.3 RoL drawing and SBIQ information

The RoL drawing took  $\pm 20$  minutes to complete. He indicated that he experienced the drawing as difficult, as, his opinion was that he could not draw. He drew a river with rocks, a mountain, grass, trees and plants and indicated his low and high point/s (See Appendix F). The interview session started directly after the RoL drawing and took  $\pm 36$  minutes. MJ did not specifically mention a turning-point at first, but after being probed by the researcher, he indicated where it started happening.

He described his understanding of 'quality of life' as follows: "It means having a positive attitude and believing in something, but mostly being able to have self-esteem and making positive informed decisions about your life". With regard to the rating scale questions, (See Appendix D) he rated himself as **happy**, **religious**, and **neutral** in terms of the importance of personal status. On the different aspects, he rated himself as follows: **Perseverance: 8; Caring: 8; Giving: 8; Positive attitude: 9; and General quality of life: 5.**

### 6.2.1.4 Discussion of themes

In MJ's story, the dominant themes to move from a low point to a high point were faith/religious belief in God, decision-making, taking responsibility, positive self-thought and attitude, decision-making/taking responsibility, doing something (goal-orientated), support to others, and meaning. In MJ's story, the sub-themes in support of his main themes were awareness, introspection, and forgiveness.

After MJ lost his father, his mother was suffering financially, as well as physically, and as a family, they were very poor. A few aspects that were present in his life assisted him to move beyond this low point in his life. MJ was extremely aware of the vulnerable state of poverty they were growing up in (“you wouldn’t be able to even ask from your parents because you know that when ... they can’t help you”). Through introspective thoughts, he compared the negatives in his own life with the positives he saw in the lives of others. MJ further experienced positive self-thought in terms of future possibilities of things he could do to help his mother (“my mind was focussing on maybe I would finish my matric, I will go and find a job so that I can assist my mom to raise ... my other sibling”). He maintained a positive attitude (“there’s always something positive that can come out of negative things”). He set himself goals to be able to help his mother. These goals were pursued with diligence and helped him move away from the state of poverty of his family. His goals were to finish matric, obtain a job and financially assist his mother. He managed to do it all, but on the day he secured a job, his mother passed away.

Even after his mother passed away, MJ had new goals to pursue, which helped him to reach a higher point of being meaningful in society and provide to others. He was very aware of his own negative, or not very positive, emotions, such as anger and feelings of sadness. This led to internal questions being asked and answers being sought. His faith in God was a crucial element in dealing with his mother’s death. MJ’s realisation of God’s purpose for his life contributed to his life’s low point turning towards a high point (“I just realised that God has a purpose with our ... lives ... individually no matter what you’re going through”). This purpose would become meaningful later on in MJ’s life in becoming and being supportive towards others. MJ made a decision to take responsibility for taking care of his brothers, sister and aunt and also the community after his mother passed away, even if it meant he had to put his own goals on hold (“we can’t afford to lose any one of us. And it’s something that I’ve been carrying to say encouraging my brother to ... continue ... with school”).

For MJ spirituality, especially faith in God, contributed strongly to his turning-point experience (“and most of the time we will pray”). Through faith he was able to cope with his low point experience (i.e. his mother’s passing away) and see God’s purpose in his life through it. To him this purpose involved helping other people. MJ confirmed his turning-point as follows: “I would say the turning-point was when, you know, as I mentioned that God has got a purpose in our lives ... There’s something that He wants us to do”.

MJ’s positive self-thought was also in terms of his faith in God. He said, “God ... took her away, so that’s like she has done whatever she has to do and now it’s time for her ... to rest and then I take

over from where she left off ... So, I think ... that's where ... everything got to turn. Because, when I look at my life, I think that's where everything started to ... go step by step ... up ... I think and I believe that I've managed to deal with it... and moved on with life". This also showed his positive attitude in dealing with the low point. In MJ's case, he initially struggled internally with thoughts and emotions about God and he also indicated having had internal conversations about or with God concerning his low point experience. Later on he would find peace (i.e. 'rest') through recognition of a solution to deal with his uncertainties regarding her death ("So somehow in my mind I felt that maybe it was time for me to rest ... God made ... took her away").

MJ was able to manage his negative emotions, such as anger. In dealing with the sadness of his mother's passing, his brother and faith in God helped him. Previously, his mother supported and helped him through his low point experiences. Although the loss of his mother was his ultimate low point, she prepared him for it, and her advice helped him through his difficult times. During the years of poverty, after his father died, and before his mother died, she provided for them and other family members helped MJ's family. After the loss of his mother, support from society (indirectly through the provision made by his mother), his brother and employment majorly benefitted MJ in his turning-point experience. His brother also helped him to forgive his aunt for not properly supporting them after their mother had passed on ("I didn't want to even forgive her, but my brother said, look, you have to let it go ... So, I forgive her ... from that moment and ... I let it go").

In MJ's story he spoke of how he provided support to others after his mother died and how his will to support his mother transpired in his own life into having purpose; being an expression what God's purpose was for him ("Some of the things maybe not about us but other people who are watching us"). MJ did a few things to start moving away from his low point experience towards his high point, such as taking care of his brothers; financially providing for his aunt and others; studying further and obtaining a tertiary qualification. Part of the spiritual aspects involved in MJ's turning-point experience involved forgiving his aunt.

The meaning that MJ found in his life was mostly spiritual in nature. He found peace after losing his mother and a sense of what God's purpose was for his life. MJ's faith in God provided him peace to move on ("I believe that I've managed to deal with it ... and moved on with life"). MJ found meaning in his life through helping his mother, brothers, family and aunt in providing for them. He was able to see something positive in the negative of losing his mother ("if it's negative or if it's something that can make me sad but what can you do to change the situation. Some you cannot change, but you can take some things out of it, like something positive"). MJ found more meaning in being able to share his story and experiences with others ("I became a facilitator. I was

working with ... young people and I will share my story ... and everything. They will come to me and say... look, I'm going through what you're going through and I'm glad that ... you managed to pull through, because I was thinking that I wouldn't be able to").

## **6.2.2 Participant 2: Trish**

### **6.2.2.1 Background information**

The researcher was informed about Trish by a work colleague as a potential participant. He approached her and invited her to participate, to which she agreed. The RoL drawing and interview were conducted during two lunchtime sessions. She was friendly and professional in demeanour. Trish regarded her life in terms of: "My life (from spy to sky) or from hero to zero" and "Life is shining like a light in the sky" (slogans on RoL drawing).

### **6.2.2.2 Summary of Trish's story**

Trish is a 44 year old African working female. During the time of the interview, she was working as a student advisor for a private higher education institution. Trish's low point started when her family relocated, both her parents lost their jobs and they as a family, became very poor. They were so poor that at some stage they did not have money for food or clothes. She did not have money to pay for her matric exams (those days a registration fee of R150-00 was required). During her younger years she also suffered some relationship problems (i.e. personal relationships with the fathers of her children did not work out). She managed to finish matric while being a single mother. She obtained various jobs and studied further to sustain herself and her family and advance her career. Her mother and father also passed away later on in life. Trish is currently in a comfortable financial position and provides for a number of people in her household. She is a hardworking, dedicated person and motivated and driven to be even more successful in what she does on a daily basis.

### **6.2.2.3 RoL drawing and SBIQ information**

The RoL drawing took  $\pm 20$  minutes to complete. Trish drew a river flowing upwards from left to right with mountains on the side and two big rocks/clouds below the river (i.e. her mother and father passing away). She also added words throughout: her challenges, low points and high points, as well as a couple of positive slogans. Her drawing looked fairly similar to the researcher's own RoL (See Appendix F). The interview took  $\pm 45$  minutes. Trish did not specifically mention a turning-point, but was probed by the researcher in asking when she started moving away from her low point (i.e. poverty) after which she indicated where the change started.



Her description of ‘quality of life’ was as follows: “Life is difficult but it needs us to take it with positive mind and always understand that things will never been [*be*] the same all the time. Sometimes things will be easier for you, sometimes will be difficult in such a way you can even think of killing yourself, but this is not the solution”. With regards to the rating scale questions (See Appendix D) she rated herself as **happy, religious**, and the importance of personal status as **very important**. On certain specific aspects, she rated herself as follows: **Perseverance: 10; Caring: 10; Giving: 10; Positive attitude: 10; and General quality of life: 10.**

#### **6.2.2.4 Discussion of themes**

In Trish’s story, the dominant themes to move from a low point to a high point were self-realisation, positive self-thought and attitude, positive self-talk, doing something, goal-orientated, perseverance/patience, and meaning. In Trish’s story, the sub-themes in support of her main themes were faith/religious belief in God, and hope.

Trish’s situation at home was one of extreme poverty. In order for it to change, she employed certain aspects, which are also presented as the themes identified by this study. She realised she had to do something about the situation (“when I finished passing my matric I realised that I have to do something in order to change the situation at home, not only looking after my parents to do that for me, it’s where I started trying to find a job. You see, then I went all over shops, clothing shops, everywhere ... restaurant to try and find a job, and I managed to get a job, my first job to say now I’m working, I was employed”). Trish took responsibility in spite of her poor upbringing circumstances in searching and finding a job and in taking care of others, which she continued doing (“I started finding my first job ... but, ja, managed to put food on the table – why things were like that better”).

Trish had a positive attitude that helped her to move beyond her low point and towards her high point. (“I didn’t wait for someone to tell me this is the way to change. No. I just thought let me find something or do something which will assist me and my family”). Trish took action to deal with possible negative emotions she could have had regarding her low point experience. She was determined in looking for and finding a job, not feeling sorry for herself. Trish also presented herself as a person who was motivated by being independent of her circumstances and other people, especially in providing for herself and taking care of others. Trish’s positive self-talk involved telling herself she will make it, and to be patient and to persevere (“Be patient and do something, persevere, because something will come out... I had it from the beginning because I keep on telling

myself I'll be patient, but I'll do something slowly but sure[ly] ... while I persevere something will be done ... they say patience and perseverance, it works").

Trish is a person who showed perseverance and patience in overcoming her negative low point experience in the past. Trish's perseverance and patience was noteworthy in her ability to move from her low point to her high point. She found that the combination of these two attributes worked for her in enabling her to build her confidence and self-belief and in doing something about her negative low point situation. Perseverance gave her self-confidence and also the ability to strive towards more still ("But at least I am where I am today because I didn't sit back and say someone will do it for me. No, no. I believe in myself").

Trish also had goals she strived to achieve, namely finishing school, getting a job, obtaining tertiary qualifications and pursuing her career. Her goal-directedness helped her to achieve her goals. She persisted in reaching her goals of finishing school (i.e. matric), getting a job, studying while she was working, and providing for her children, as well as other family members ("It was also far from home, sometimes we come back at home at 11 o'clock and it's so dangerous, But you have to work ... then I was working and studying at the same time ... studied at night ... finishing very late also, at about 10 o'clock. I have to go and catch a bus at 10 o'clock at that time, go back home. Ja. But I did that at least for two years").

Coming from a very poor background, Trish took charge of her circumstances to change it, although it was a step-by-step and 'slowly but surely' process. Through patience and perseverance, she looked for and found a job; and managed to get a sponsor for her studies. She was committed, working and studying simultaneously, which enabled her to eventually provide for her family and many others. She became financially independent ("But we hung in there ... I carried on and finished my matric ... I couldn't stop going to school because I knew what I wanted to achieve and I carried on with schooling. I finished my matric ... I started trying to find a job. You see, then I went all over ... I couldn't stop studying while I was working ... to try and find a job, and I managed to get a job ... I have to take over to look after my siblings, which there are four at home, to look after the other three. Which was worse, because the other two of them already also have children, so I have to look after six people on top of that ... I've managed up to now. I'm still looking after them").

Trish found meaning by having a job, becoming independent and being able to take care of others. She was once very poor, but was now providing for a whole household. She described her experience as from 'zero to hero' ("Like, from low to high. Ja, that's why some of them say from

zero to hero”... I managed to get a job ... upgrading from other things ... I can also manage to buy food in the house and buy something ... I didn’t wait for someone to tell me this is the way to change. No. I just thought let me find something or do something which will assist me and my family”). She also experienced growth in herself (“and I’ve got everything, I still feel that I still need to do more to make more changes in my life, you see. But at least I am where I am today because I didn’t sit back ... I believe in myself”).

Trish’s faith and religious belief in God was an important part of her ability to manage her circumstances of being poor, having to finish matric, finding a job, studying while working and having children and other family members to take care of. She said, “But God was there for me, I’ve managed up to now. I’m still looking after them”. Finding meaning in hope she had these words of wisdom: “No matter how big the mountain can be, but if we’ve got that hope that one day I will climb that mountain ... from where I come from I don’t think it’s difficult to climb that mountain, any person can do as long as you’ve got that hope”. Trish indicated that she had hope and believed that she would not be in her negative low point experience forever and had expected to come out of it. She said, “So, I always hope[d] or I always believe[d] in that if you’re down you’ll never be down forever. If you do something for yourself, it will never be down forever but you will go up”.

### **6.2.3 Participant 3: Razz**

#### **6.2.3.1 Background information**

Razz was recruited via a gatekeeper organisation committed to assist talented young and upcoming athletes, who are financially disadvantaged, to excel in sport and reach their maximum potential. The researcher approached the gatekeeper organisation whose program national co-coordinator gave the necessary permission to approach provincial representatives in order to recruit participants. This organisation identified potential candidates and provided them with the researcher’s official documents regarding the current study. Razz was one of these candidates. The interview, in general, was relaxed. Razz seemed very at ease and he came over as a person with a positive attitude. In his own opinion, he has not reached a significant (‘ultimate’) high point in his life yet, however he indicated that he has definitely been able to come out of a low point already, rendering his experience significant.

### 6.2.3.2 Summary of Razz's story

Razz is 23 year old young Coloured male, who is an eager sportsman. He indicated his current job appointment as being a student. As his low point, he suffered personal loss in losing his father and his girlfriend. He also experienced failed performance at and expelled from the institution where he studied, as well as poor performance on the sport field. He suffered sport injuries and, in his own words, “got involved with the wrong friends”. Razz was very successful in athletics during his school years. He managed to help someone else in a dire situation, while he was still in his low point stadium. His personal relationship with his mother improved and he has managed to deal with the loss of his father and girlfriend. In being honest with himself, he attained a new look on life. Razz regards himself as a positive person and still aspires to achieve more in life. Although he has indicated that he has not reached his high point yet, he was very close to it and regarded himself to be out of his low point situation.

### 6.2.3.3 RoL drawing and SBIQ information

The RoL drawing took  $\pm 20$  minutes to complete. He drew a racetrack and himself running on it, three suns (for highs) and a dark cloud (for lows), along with words and pictorial representations as a summary of his story, calling it “My Race”. (See Appendix F). The RoL drawing was used as an introduction to the interview and to elicit storytelling. The interview in total took  $\pm 20$  minutes. Razz did not specifically mention a turning-point, but was probed by the researcher with the aspects of the research question to indicate where the change started. He indicated a turning-point thereafter.

His description of how he understands ‘quality of life’ was as follows: “My understanding of QOL is believing that your life is at a point where you find yourself having achieved your goals and happy with what you have done. I have put ‘7’ because I now know what I need to do to reach my Quality Life, I am happy but more is yet to come”. In terms of the rating scale questions (See Appendix D) he rated himself as **happy**, **religious**, and the importance of personal status, as **important**. On the different aspects, he rated himself as follows: **Perseverance: 10; Caring: 8; Giving: 8; Positive attitude: 8; and General quality of life: 7.**

### 6.2.3.4 Discussion of themes

In Razz's story, the dominant themes in moving from a low point to a high point were, introspection (honest to himself), self-realisation, positive self-thought and attitude, doing something (goal-orientated) and meaning. In Razz's story, the sub-themes in support of his main themes were faith/religious belief in God and support from and to others.

Razz's low points were the passing away of his girlfriend and his father, failing at tertiary school and having financial problems. Certain aspects, presented as themes in the study, were present in his life. Razz went through the process of introspection by being honest with himself. He made the discovery that he was scared. Through introspection he gained knowledge about where he was, where he wanted to be and what he needed to do to get there. As a result, he became positive, and started to act and speak accordingly, while at the same time he was honest to others as well ("I'd say not a matter of saying something, not a matter of feeling something, but matter of just being honest to myself. First, be honest to yourself, knowing what I need to do, knowing where I am, then that's when change started").

Razz realised he was good at sports, that he cherished support from his parents and that he needed to appreciate them. His realisation provided him with confidence and the necessary clarity about what to do in order to change his circumstances ("primary school which was very important for me ... because that's where my sport started. That's where I realised, actually that I was quite good at sports ... lots of schools wanted me in their facility, because I was such an asset to them ... I got the first white blazer at school"). Razz's honesty with himself formed an important basis for his turning-point experience. In being open and frank regarding his feelings and thoughts, he could start acting to develop a positive attitude towards what he was doing and also honesty towards others ("I was honest to myself first and foremost ... honest to myself, told myself: 'you know what, this is who I am right now, this is who I want to be and this is who I need to be ... That's when ... I started becoming positive about things").

Razz discovered more about his identity in being honest to himself. This was important to him in order to start effecting changes in his life's circumstances ("I started becoming positive about things I was doing"). Razz's thoughts were positive in the way he looked at life, as well as in approaching others ("If you're honest you attract the positive people in life. So, that's my look at things ... start attracting positive things in life. No matter what it is"). His positive attitude stemmed from his self-honesty, as well as from his positive self-thought, self-confidence and achievements in life. He has managed to move out of his low point (coping with his father passing away) and is close to reaching his (ultimate) high point ("But through my actions, through being honest to myself, through being honest to people I speak to... helps me as well to actually get to where I want to be ... I mean, if you lie [*accentuates it*], that attracts people that are bad in life, you know").

Razz still shows that he is goal-orientated and wants to achieve in sport ("and then I still have a lot... a lot to do; a long way to go... we'll see from this corner if I come back in the next... two or three years. You will feel the sunshine, all the nice things, hopefully, so I'm not done yet.

Regarding his current position he said, “I’m not at the high point yet, but I’m getting there... I’m out of the... Ja... so, I’m out of the low point, I’ll tell you that”. Although Razz’s words indicated that he has not yet reached the high point (the current researcher would phrase it: **highest point**), he clearly indicated that he was out of the low point. He further stated that he was very close to the high point. In terms of having gained meaning in life and having had successes on his way towards the highest point, he technically did qualify to be a suitable participant in this study. He indicated that he found meaning through peak performances in sport, while dedicating his performance to his father who passed away (“So I’m quite positive about my dad [*unclear*]... [*figure it out*] [*unclear*]”). He also found meaning through having a new outlook on life and being out of his low point. He said, “So, I feel that I’ve got a new approach to life, that’s where I went from a low point [*unclear*] towards a high point. I’m not at the high point yet, but it’s very close ... Ja, so, I’m out of the low point, I’ll tell you that”. Further meaning, according to Razz, implied helping another and being emotionally uplifted by it. Razz’s unique sayings (relating to his sport, triple jump) were: “My sport just went from mundane to sky high ... I was jumping in the skies”.

Faith and religious belief were important to Razz, as it formed part of his upbringing, with his mother inspiring him to uphold his faith. His own, as well as his mother’s faith in God, helped him through his turning-point experience. His faith provided a positive view in approaching the negative experiences which he regarded as a door being closed (I didn’t know what ... how to feel at that point. And I was sad, there was a lot of emotions that came to the whole ... my dad passed away ... it was a low ... but what inspired me was my mom’s belief, my mom’s... faith. My father was a pastor, so, I was brought up in a church environment. So ... I had faith that the Lord has something better. If he closes a door, he opens a [*unclear*] [*door*] ... that kind of stuff. As clichéd as it sounds, I do believe in it. That’s my faith”). The gatekeeper organisation representative played a significant role to support Razz through difficult times to deal with the loss of his father. “...in the same year... I spoke to [*mentions gatekeeper organisation representative’s name*] about what I was going through... he gave me light [*unclear*] for a bit of sunshine... cleared my mind... I started doing well again in my academics ... and... [*mentions gatekeeper organisation representative’s name*]... such great support to me. I mean... conversations I had with him, you know, inspired me. Telling me it’s not the end, it actually is the beginning, you know... I’ve lost my dad, I’ve lost my previous girlfriend, I’ve failed, I’ve done this, but actually some things you do, and if they don’t work out, try something else, it doesn’t mean that you’ve failed in life, it just means that that wasn’t what you were meant to do [*unclear*] [*then kick*] at something else”).

Razz indicated that his emotions were ‘boosted’ by doing something good for someone else, meaning he felt good about having been able to emotionally support his friend in a time of need. He indicated that he felt proud and happy about his friend’s achievements and his circumstances that have changed for the better. It gave him hope and positive expectations about the future regarding his own high point ahead. Razz’s support to another contributed significantly to him being happy, ~~being~~ proud, having hope and having positive (‘boosted’) emotions (“[I’m] proud [and] happy to say, right now, this guy [unclear]... came back with a medal ... that boosted me emotionally, [boosted] the effect as well... do something good for someone, you know... not necessarily trying to get back something... but like something emotionally for me, [now] help someone ... While I was going through a rough time myself I managed to actually help someone else that is going through something that’s worse than [unclear]. So, that actually gave me hope as well”). By helping another in need, and then seeing the person doing well afterwards, enriched and uplifted him and assisted him in coping with his own negative emotions experienced after his losses and setbacks. Razz also had hope that he could still be successful. In providing support to another, he gained hope, which in turn helped him gain new self-belief; an expectation that he could also experience a high point similar to the person he helped. The support provided to someone else was actually also supportive to him, which resulted in re-gaining support from his sports coach. Razz found appreciation for the achievement he accomplished shortly after his father passed away. He showed this through dedicating his sport achievement to his dad, which inspired him further to perform in devotion to him (“and he passed away ... to my gratitude, to my happiness I actually won the competition. I got gold, and uhm... I dedicated that to my dad. So it kind of inspired me to actually, you know, do my sport in his name”).

#### **6.2.4 Participant 4: Simone**

##### **6.2.4.1 Background information**

Simone is a talented young and upcoming athlete, who was financially disadvantaged, and identified for support in order to excel in sport and reach her maximum potential.

##### **6.2.4.2 Summary of Simone’s story**

Simone is a 20 year old Coloured female college student who had a very negative experience by sustaining injuries in a car accident. Family circumstances and relationships changed negatively after the accident, which was a low point to her. Both parents were unemployed for a certain time, they were very poor for a while (e.g. not having sufficient food), and from her point of view, they, as a family, also suffered spiritually by not attending church and/or living out their religion due to a

change in their religious beliefs. She also experienced deterioration in academic performance at school. One of her family members became involved with drugs and started stealing. At a very low point she was confronted with suicidal thoughts. Her situation changed when she made new friends, the family acquired a new car and reinstituted their religious practices. Her faith in God helped and supported her towards new insights into her own life. She realised that life was precious. Simone was able to overcome significant negative challenges and obtained a new refreshed outlook and perspective on life.

#### 6.2.4.3 RoL drawing and SBIQ information

The RoL drawing took  $\pm 25$  minutes to complete. Instead of a river, Simone drew two trees: one dead tree (i.e. indicating her low point) and one live tree bearing fruit (i.e. indicating her high point). She also drew a sun and dark clouds as well as sunny clouds with words summarising her story (See Appendix F). After she had drawn her picture, the interview, which took  $\pm 20$  minutes, started. The RoL drawing was used as an introduction to the interview to prompt the participant's storytelling. In the sun, she wrote: "See life in a different way". Simone did not specifically mention a turning-point, but was probed by the researcher to speak about what happened to move from the low point to the high point. She then started talking about how she was able to come out of her lowest point.

Her description of how she understands 'quality of life' is as follows: "Quality of life is basically for me what you make in life and how you see it as a person, like say if you are doing something right, you would see the quality in it and you would use it in your life, so that you may be a better person for yourself and a better person for other people and how you will respect yourself and the others around you, so that you may see the quality in it, and quality means some good". In terms of the rating scale questions (See Appendix D) she rated herself as **happy**, **religious**, and the importance of personal status, as **very important**. On the different aspects she rated herself as follows: **Perseverance: 6; Caring: 8; Giving: 10; Positive attitude: 10; and General quality of life: 7.**

#### 6.2.4.4 Discussion of themes

In Simone's story, the dominant themes to move from a low point to a high point were faith/religious belief (God), self-realisation, positive self-thought, positive attitude, doing something, taking responsibility, future-orientated, and meaning. In Simone's story, the sub-theme in support of her main themes was support to others.



Simone experienced dismal circumstances at home, such as poverty and ineffective interpersonal relationships following their family's ordeal of being in a car accident (i.e. injuries and loss of the car), as a low point. Certain aspects, presented as themes in the study, were present in her experience of moving away from the low towards the high point. Simone received support from the gatekeeper organisation's representative and her faith in God was strengthened through his support. Her religious belief supported her in experiencing positive changes in her life. Someone else from her church further assisted her in seeing life in a new light ("And then I met someone and he showed me like there is a way in life, there's new beginnings to everything. You don't have to worry about the past anymore ... the person I met... it's wonderful. [Unclear] ... just showed me like every day, when I talk to him, it's all about God, every day. That's ... my strong belief. Like God, he will make a way no matter what. Now everything is just... I see life... like a tree; a colourful tree with apples and just all kinds of fruit. It's just... good for me now. I'm just happy where I am now ... like when it's a beautiful sunny day").

Simone's negative experience of circumstances at home and issues regarding her education, changing for the worse after being in a car accident, were relieved by attending church again and being re-assured of having faith in God ("at that point we were attending church, and then after that we just stopped, because we didn't believe there is a God anymore. We just stopped everything and then I lost friends in my life, they didn't want to hang out with me anymore. It was just ... everything in college went wrong. My marks dropped a bit ... But know there is a God ... But at that point things started getting better, they got jobs now and now the family [unclear] someone like I said ... and then I started attending church again ... my life ... started attending church again, my family followed. They followed me and came with me and then God just showed us a different way. I started doing well in college ... And then the family now ... we're just stronger than ever, because we just see every day, it's a new day").

For Simone, realisation was on a very personal level, leading to abandoning suicidal thoughts and a will to live. She said, "You see at the time, when things were going so wrong, I always thought about suicide ... but then I realised: it's not the way ... it's not something, because then I take my life and then I [unclear – leave] my parents ... I had pills and stuff in my hand and just thought this is it, but then I just realised this is my life. I can't take it, that's not the right thing to do ...". Simone used positive self-thought in dealing with her suicidal thoughts ("but then I just knew, this isn't right I shouldn't do this. But then after that I didn't think about that anymore. I should just move forward, ja, because that's what I thought, it's the best way"). Also, she did not think about negative circumstances of the past anymore.

For Simone it was important to take responsibility; she cared for her family, by assisting her parents (“but at that point in my life ... I learned to be responsible ... so I started [unclear] like to be ... [unclear] because I’m the elder sister, I just [helped out] my parents and stuff ... But at that point things started getting better, they got jobs”) and speaking to her brother about his wrongdoings (“They sent him to rehab just to help him and then when he came from rehab, he was ... we thought he was going to be a better person. But then he was worse ... But then eventually he got better, because now we started speaking to him that what he’s doing is not right”) Simone’s positive attitude in overcoming her low point experience regarding their poor and negative home circumstances was visible through the very descriptive words used during the interview in confirmation and explanation of her colourful and imaginative RoL drawing (“because we just see every day, it’s a new day. We don’t have to look back at the past, we can just smiling, look for the future ... We don’t have to look back at the past, we can just smiling, look for the future”).

Simone’s meaning included a positive outlook, seeing life in a different way and being future orientated. She said, “This is a tree [unclear]... the leaves here and stuff [unclear]... tree [unclear] blooming... [unclear]... Ja, because now I feel life is more... I think in a different way... colourful for me now [unclear] today I wake up it’s with a smile, I don’t have to worry about stuff anymore”. Simone’s viewpoint after all that has happened is: “I see life like a... like a tree; a colourful tree with apples and just all kinds of fruit. It’s just, it’s just good for me now. I’m just happy where I am now”.

### **6.2.5 Participant 5: Hazel**

#### **6.2.5.1 Background information**

Hazel is a talented young and upcoming athlete, who was financially disadvantaged, and identified by the gatekeeper organisation for support in order to excel in sport and reach her maximum potential. During the interview Hazel was quite emotional, but when asked if she wanted to stop, she did not hesitate to indicate that it was all right to continue. Hazel spoke softly, at times incoherent and not very clearly. The researcher had to probe her with questions later in the interview to get responses from her. However, she showed inner strength and boldness in continuing to tell her story. She indicated that she had adequately moved away from her low point, and had been able to overcome her background of poverty and that she started moving to a meaningful high point. This participant might have been the most vulnerable participant of the group, but showed inner strength in being prepared to tell her story to the researcher, who was a stranger to her.

### 6.2.5.2 Summary of Hazel's story

Hazel is a 20 year old African female student who comes from a very poor upbringing. Her low point was the loss of her father. Three years after her father passed away her mother lost her job, which was another low point for Hazel. They were very poor, (for example, at times Hazel had to study by candle light), nevertheless, she managed to pass matric. Her mother could not afford to pay for further studies, but the gatekeeper organisation supported them and she was able to attend her first year at college. She was sponsored to participate in sport. In spite of her background circumstances, she was able to pass her studies, to start a meaningful relationship characterised with trust, and she was willing to share her story with others and prepared to help them when in similar circumstances.

### 6.2.5.3 RoL drawing and SBIQ information

The RoL drawing took  $\pm 10$  minutes to complete. Hazel drew two trees (one dead and one live tree) instead of a river for her low and high points respectively. There were also clouds and a smiling face sun in front of a cloud (See Appendix F). The RoL drawing was used as an introduction to the interview in order to elicit the participant's storytelling. The interview session commenced following the RoL drawing and took  $\pm 20$  minutes. Hazel did not specifically mention a turning-point, but was probed by the researcher to indicate where things started to improve. She then indicated where things began to change.

Her description of how she understands 'quality of life' is as follows: "Quality of life means that sharing with other people your story and how you live your life. My life is different to other people because of have experience lots of thing in life. For now my quality of life is much better than before, I am to[o] shy to share my life with other people, but now I am happy that I have shared my story. Maybe it might touch/help someone talk about his/her life and how she/he grew up". With regard to the rating scale questions (See Appendix D) she rated herself as **happy**, **very religious**, and the importance of personal status, as **very important**. On the different aspects, she rated herself as follows: **Perseverance: 10; Caring: 10; Giving: 10; Positive attitude: 10; and General quality of life: 10.**

### 6.2.5.4 Discussion of themes

In Hazel's story, the dominant themes moving from a low point to a high point were perseverance, support from others, doing something, and meaning. In Hazel's story, the unique theme in support of her main themes was self-thought (honesty and hope).

Hazel's low point was her father passing away and their family being very poor thereafter. In order for her to be able to move away from her low point, a few things were present within her turning-point experience, such as emotional support from a friend (i.e. the gatekeeper organisation representative) whom she could talk to and trust ("It started changing ... like if I have a problem, I do talk to [*mentions gatekeeper organisation representative's name*]. Yes. But I feel much better. Because I have someone to talk to and I'm too shy, so ... Yes, I can trust him"). Furthermore, she also had support from others (e.g. the gatekeeper organisation and her sponsorship bursary) to move towards her high point. She said, "Yes, it was the low, but after I got into the school ... everything changed at home ... They [*refers to gatekeeper organisation*] paid for my school fees ... they bought school uniform ... stationery, then I matriculated in 2011. I did pass my matric ... So, I was so stressed that my mom couldn't afford it ... money for me to go to college ... So, in 2013, there were SASCOC bursaries, so we had to apply for it and ... we didn't get that bursaries ... the opportunity to pay for us to study ... And then ... my second year I got bursary from school, from [*unclear*] college. I did pass my first year ... So, my life ... my life is changing compared to the last time".

There were various achievements that stood out to the researcher indicating that Hazel had started moving away from her low point and had some higher points on her way to her highest point. By studying hard and finishing matric, Hazel was able to start moving away from her low point experience in doing something positive in the direction of her high point. Through perseverance, she was able to study under very poor conditions. Hazel showed that she could persevere even when her circumstances were very demanding in terms of the death of her father, and the poverty in which she was brought up. She was able to study, even by candle light, and still pass her matric. She said, "[*Researcher: '... you matriculated?'*] ... Yes, it's a high point for me ... Yes, it was difficult for me, because I didn't think that I would pass. Honestly ... I lived in a shack ... in a two room shack. I lived with my mom, my younger brother, my older brother and my sister. So, we don't have ... we don't use electricity at all, so, it was hard for me to study. So, I ... I had to use a candle to study ...".

Hazel's hurt in respect of her low point (i.e. father passing away) was quite visible and at times she was overwhelmed by emotions. In general, it seemed that she had not fully reached her emotional high point yet, but in being able to share her story, the researcher was of the opinion that she was getting there. Furthermore, she drew a tree with fruit as her high point and a smiling sun in front of a cloud.

One way of dealing with her hurt seemed to be finding something positive regarding the subject of her low point (i.e. her father). To deal with her problems during difficult times, she would think positively and try to think of what her father would have said. Hazel's positive self-thought came through after being honest with herself about not knowing what to do. She said, "It was so painful, because ... because I was young: fifteen years old ... So, I didn't know [*unclear*] [*how to cope with it*] ... very painful ... Even now sometimes, when things are difficult ... I still remember [*unclear*] ... I wish my father was here, maybe he would say this and this ...".

Hazel also found meaning in achievement and educational success in spite of difficult circumstances. Further aspects of finding meaning included being future orientated, sharing with others in order to help others. She indicated that perseverance helped her to find a sense of meaning in her life. She said, "[*Researcher asks: '... you matriculated?'*] ... Yes, it's a high point for me ... Yes, it was difficult for me, because I didn't think that I would pass. Honestly ...". She was future-orientated in aspiring to help others and share her story later on by saying: "But I feel much better ... "[*Researcher states: '... somewhere your story might reach somebody?'*] ... Yes ... Maybe I would like to share my stories with others. Maybe there are people that have the same stories"). She did experience a change from the low point towards a high point ("I did pass my first year, so, they say [*unclear*] [*I'm too old to ...*]. So, my life ... my life is changing compared to the last time").

## **6.2.6 Participant 6: Noel**

### **6.2.6.1 Background information**

Noel, a senior male, was recruited as participant via a work colleague who arranged for the researcher to contact and meet him. Noel, who was rendered disabled after an accident, was very friendly, eager to participate and talkative. He often made jokes during the RoL drawing and the interview. Noel did not elaborate spontaneously on his father's attitude towards him being disabled and was not probed to do so, as the researcher did not want to interrupt him while he was speaking freely and openly, elaborating in detail. Instead he directly followed this part of his story with a comment on how he was able to cope effectively with his accident and about him being a happy-go-lucky person. Noel's story covered many years and would present sufficient information to analyse. The turning-point experience in Noel's case took a gradual form during the story, being not about directly changing the low point (i.e. changing physical disability), but rather indirectly (i.e. dealing with or adapting to it).

#### 6.2.6.2 Summary of Noel's story

Noel is a 67 year old White male pensioner, who has been disabled (i.e. wheelchair bound) since he was a young adult due to a spinal injury. He had a very positive and of fairly high standard of upbringing and was even head boy during his school years. After school, he found employment in the mining industry. He was injured while playing rugby, which caused his disability. This was his low-point, but he also experienced further low points: one with regards to being accepted as a disabled person, especially his father's behaviour towards him, and another being accused of using anabolic substances during the Paralympics, leading to a temporary ban from participation. During his adult life he was able to study, and he also became a successful, national representative as a sport person, in spite of his disability. Noel is married and has a child. He has a very positive outlook on life, seems to be 'happy-go-lucky' and playful and likes to make jokes. He has won various medals in athletics for field events and set a few records, on national as well as international level. Noel overcame a setback during international participation when he tested positive for an anabolic substance. This prevented him to compete in an event and led to a ban from future participation. However, later on he was found innocent of an offence and the ban was lifted. Currently, he seems to be living in financial comfort and comes over as an emotionally happy person, functioning well and independent of others and managing a small business from home.

#### 6.2.6.3 RoL drawing and SBIQ information

The RoL drawing took  $\pm 30$  minutes to complete. Noel drew a river with mountains and trees and words indicating a summary of low and high points (See Appendix F ). The interview started directly after completion of the RoL drawing, which formed the basis for the story that followed. The interview session lasted  $\pm 45$  minutes. Noel did not specifically mention a turning-point, but when probed by the researcher to indicate what led to coming out of his low point, he provided an answer.

His description of how he understands 'quality of life' is as follows: "Very positive about my situation. I strive to be example to others in the same position as I am or worse". With regard to the rating scale questions (See Appendix D) he rated himself as **very happy**, **religious**, and **neutral** in terms of the importance of personal status. On the different aspects, he rated himself as follows: **Perseverance: 8; Caring: 9; Giving: 4; Positive attitude: 9; and General quality of life: 9.**

#### 6.2.6.4 Discussion of themes

In Noel's story, the dominant themes in moving from a low point to a high point were positive outlook/attitude, happy-go-lucky/humour, goal-orientated, doing something, and meaning. In Noel's story, the sub-themes in support of his main themes were support from, and perseverance.

Noel's positive outlook on and attitude in life has been present since the start of his low point (i.e. becoming disabled). It was apparent throughout his story and it helped him to overcome various challenges towards his high point/s. He said this regarding becoming a paraplegic: "Toe sê ek, 'Pa, ek het my rug gebreek', en toe lag ek nog ... 'Nee pa, wel wat kan ek doen, dis maar een van daai dinge' ... Ek het bietjie sleg gevoel, maar nie so baie nie". [Researcher's own free translation (ROFT): "*Then I said, 'Dad, I broke my back' and then I laughed ... 'No Dad, what can I do, it's one of those things' ... I felt a little bit sad, but not so much*"]. In general, he said, "So, ek was bietjie morbied, maar ons het nog sports gehad tussenin, jy weet. Lekker ge-'pot'". [ROFT: "*... so I was a little bit morbid, but we had lots of fun in-between. Booazed a lot ...*"]. Regarding his temporary ban to participate in the Paralympics due to alleged illegal substance intake, as well as in general, he said, Wel, ek is 'n baie positiewe ou, jy weet. Ek probeer altyd die ligkant sien in 'n situasie... Ek het my ongeluk en goed als goed verwerk ... ek probeer van als 'n grap maak en dit het my bietjie gepla. [ROFT: "*Well, I am a very positive guy, I always try to see the lighter side of a situation. I have coped with my accident and everything quite effectively ... I try to make a joke about everything and this bothered me a little bit*"].

Noel revealed that he had a 'happy-go-lucky' way (or nature) of handling his low point experience(s). Since the day he became physically disabled, he exhibited this nature, which in a way can be seen as closely related to positive attitude ("Jy kan maar sien...ek is 'n happy-go-lucky ou man... Ek is net so van nature, jy weet en ek is baie bly daaroor ... maar ek is anders. Ek wil net sing en happy wees. So, ek is 'n losgat, ligsinnig [*unclear*]. Ek weet nie wat nie, en dis hoekom ek al hierdie goed seker kon verwerk ... Ek het my ongeluk en goed als goed verwerk en ek was happy-go-lucky my hele lewe". [ROFT: "*You can see ... I'm a happy-go-lucky old man. I am naturally like this and I'm happy about it ... but I am different. I just want to sing and be happy. So ... I am a carefree, frivolous ... I don't know why, but I think that is why I was able to cope with all these things ... I have coped with my accident (i.e. disability) and everything quite effectively and I have been happy-go-lucky all my life*"].

Noel's humouristic approach was quite noticeable during the interview. He often used humour during his storytelling, indicating his unique way of communicating information about his

experiences. It seemed that this was one of the ways of handling his negative low point experiences. He said this in relation to his accident: “Toe sê ek, ‘pa, ek het my rug gebreek’, en toe lag ek nog. En toe sê hy, ‘en dan lag jy nog, jou klein donder’... Maar dit was nie te erg nie en baie sports gehad daar in die hospital”. [ROFT: “*Then I said, ‘Dad, I broke my back’ and then I laughed. He then said, ‘...and you can laugh about it... you little bugger’. But that was not too serious and we had lots of ‘sports’ there in hospital*”]. He also said, “ek probeer van als ‘n grap maak ... Ek was ‘n grapgat op skool ... Ek was ‘n grapgat, maar baie stout ook ... jy weet, as ek drink, is ek die grootste donnerse sport [*unclear*] ... ek sit en sing in die hoek, jy weet. Die ander ouens baklei ... Nee, ek kan vir jou baie stories vertel, van my stoutigheid”. [ROFT: “*I try to joke about everything ... I was a ‘joker’ at school, but very naughty too. You know when I drink, I am the biggest ‘sport’. I sit in the corner and sing ... the other guys fight ... No, I can tell you many stories about my mischief*”].

Noel received support from professionals, his family, his friends and fellow athletes, as well as through others in offering him with a job. When taking about the day he was injured and became paraplegic, he had this to say: “Ek was tussen ‘n klomp ouens daar in die hospital. Ons het lekker sports gemaak en so aan ... en baie sports gehad daar in die hospitaal. En toe is ek ontslaan ... Toe hou ons daar partytjie, ek en my pa en my ma en my boetie en my suster en twee van my pa se vriende en vriendinne, en my ma-hulle se vriende”. [ROFT: “*the guys and I in the hospital had a lot of ‘sports’ ... after being released from hospital, we had a big party at my parent’s house with my father, mother, brother and sister and my parents’ friends*”]. After his physical rehabilitation, he obtained work from an employer who was very accommodating and supportive towards him, especially regarding further education. During the Paralympics, when he was being suspected of using illegal substances for performance enhancement, his fellow athletes supported him while his local doctor provided evidence to clear him from allegations (“en die ous ... ouens dra vir my kos aan. Ek kan nie eers eetsaal toe gaan ... *jis*, hulle het lekker kos, en die ouens het vir my kos aangedra. Dan staan die Britse Pers daar onder, ‘[Noel], come down, we want to speak to you’. Dan sê die ander, ‘nee, hy slaap’ of ‘hy’s nie hier nie”). [ROFT: “*They brought ~~me~~ food to my room ... delicious food ... If the press wanted to know what was going on, they covered for me*”].

Noel’s life story is evident of someone who had many goals, especially related to his sport achievements, and who strongly pursued them. He had also reached various life goals, such as working, getting married and having children, which contributed to his life having meaning. He coached himself regarding his sport. Noel also revealed that he could persevere in his sport in spite of his disability and setbacks. He had a strong will to prepare for competing at international level



and obtained many achievements (i.e. medals and records). He said, “Ek het baie meer hoogtepunte gehad as laagtepunte”. [ROFT: “*I had many more high points than low points*”]. Noel found meaning in being light-hearted and happy-go-lucky in his approach towards his disability and in coping with difficulties (“Wel, ek is ‘n baie positiewe ou, jy weet. Ek probeer altyd die ligkant sien in ‘n situasie”). [ROFT: “*Well I am a very positive guy, you know ... I always try to see the lighter side of things within a situation*”]. As a disabled person, he worked, trained, competed, got married, and had a child to make his life more fulfilling.

## **6.2.7 Participant 7: Hulk**

### **6.2.7.1 Background information**

Hulk was recruited via the gatekeeper organisation’s provincial representative; he was not a sportsperson, but a personal acquaintance of the representative. Hulk was very polite and displayed a positive demeanour. Hulk did not indicate that becoming a hemiplegic was a significant low point; in fact, he indicated that to him it was a small thing and later on during his school years, he was emotionally strong about it. His unhappiness in his work and moving around could have been regarded as low points, but, again, they were not regarded as significant by him [He only indicated one low point in his RoL drawing]. The researcher therefore decided to analyse only the story as it pertains to the lowest point and as elaborated upon by him.

### **6.2.7.2 Summary of Hulk’s story**

Hulk is a 29 year old White male courier who is running his own small business on the side. He had suffered from medical conditions since the age of two years and became a hemiplegic when he was three years old. In spite of his medical condition he has been able to finish matric, obtain various jobs and start a serious personal relationship as a young adult. Although being unhappy in his job at a certain stage could be seen as a low point in his life, the significant low point indicated by him was that his personal relationship did not work out and he was heartbroken as a result of the break-up. He was also unemployed and without income for a while. He has recently learned to accept the situation regarding the break-up, has been able to find a job again, while he continues on his road of total recovery (i.e. reaching his high point in full). Hulk has received professional help to assist him in overcoming his situation.

### **6.2.7.3 RoL drawing and SBIQ information**

The RoL drawing took  $\pm 30$  minutes to complete. Hulk drew a flowing river narrowing at the low point, but broadening into the high point and at places in the past when things were better. He also

drew flowers, rocks, trees, grass and a sun (See Appendix F). The interview session started directly after the RoL drawing and took  $\pm 45$  minutes. The participant talked freely for quite a long time and mentioned a turning-point, but was further probed by the researcher with the aspects of the research question to indicate where the situation turned, to which he responded without hesitation.

His description of how he understands ‘quality of life’ is as follows: “Jou persoonlike geluk; Jou verhouding teenoor ander mense. Is mens gelukkig in jou werk en waar jy bly en finansiële onafhanklik” [ROFT: “*Your personal happiness; your relationship with other people. Are you happy as a person in your work and where you stay and financially independent*”]. In terms of the rating scale questions (See Appendix D) he rated himself as **happy**, **very religious**, and **neutral** in terms of the importance of personal status. On the different aspects, he rated himself as follows: **Perseverance: 7; Caring: 7; Giving: 7; Positive attitude: 7; and General quality of life: 5.**

#### 6.2.7.4 Discussion of themes

In Hulk’s story, the dominant themes to move from a low point to a high point were faith/religious belief in God, support from, doing something, and meaning. In Hulk’s story, the sub-theme in support of his main themes was positive attitude.

Hulk was devastated after the break-up of a serious personal relationship. In order for him to move away from this low point in his life, certain aspects that were revealed in his story as themes have been present in his life. Hulk described a detailed religious experience he had regarding his faith in God (referring to God as ‘Father’). He questioned God; spoke to him in prayer about his disappointments, made specific requests, cried and felt hopeless (“En daai Sondag het ek gelê en huil tot my liewe Vader ... Ek het Hom eintlik half bevraagteken. Ek was baie kleingelowig ... vir Hom gevra, “asseblief, ek kan nie meer nie ... bring net ‘n draaipunt in my lewe; laat ek net ... Toe is ek *down-in-the-dumps*. Glad geen lig gesien nie. Moedeloos verby gewees. Ek het my geloof verloor, ek het my godsdiens of my Vader bevraagteken, is hy werklik daar? ... So, toe is ek nou rerig moedeloos”). [ROFT: “*and that Sunday I was crying to my dear Father ... actually questioning Him ... asking Him: ‘Please, I can’t anymore, just give me a turning-point in my life, let me just’ ... I was down-in-the-dumps ... not seeing the light ... totally disheartened ... questioned my religion or my Father ... I was really disheartened?*”].

Furthermore, he also said, “Ek het verseker met my ... met ons Vader gepraat, daarbo ... maar ek het wel eerlik my hart oopgemaak vir die Here en vir Hom [unclear] ... by Hom gepleit vir vergifnis en Hom genader vir werk ... ek het vir Hom gevra om ook uitdruklik my oë oop te maak. My te help om bietjie van die pyn ontslae te raak, en soos ek sê, die raad wat ek by die mense gekry

het ... vir 'n beter 'eye-opener' kon ek nie gevra het nie. En dit is alles via ons Vader". [ROFT: "*Certainly, I spoke to our Father. I honestly opened my heart to the Lord and begged for forgiveness and approached Him for work ... I asked Him pertinently to open my eyes; to help me get rid of the pain. And as I said, the advice other people gave me ... for a better 'eye-opener' I could not ask. And that all because of our Father*"]. The spiritual aspect contributed significantly to his turning-point experience as he provided much detail about this experience and highlighted its importance by saying "it was all via our Father [translated]".

Stemming from his spiritual experience he received work ("en Hom genader vir werk ... en toe hoor ek sommer, nee, die werk is myne, ek moet dadelik inval. En daar was dit vir my klaar 'n draaipunt"). [ROFT: "*approached Him for work ... and then I heard the job was mine, I must start immediately. That was already a turning-point*"].

Also in terms of obtaining professional help, which he was at first reluctant to obtain, Hulk was provided an eye-opener, which enabled him to see his negative experience in a new and positive light ("En toe boek ek my hierso in by [mentions health care facility]. Want eers was ek opstandig teen dit ... 'eventually' toe ek nog so geknak het, sê ek, "nee, boek my maar in ... So, nadat ek uit [mentions health care facility] uit is, sien ek rêrig die lig, want ek gaan hier uitgaan en stap in 'n nuwe werk in. Ek voel goed oor myself, ek voel my denkwysie het verander; ek wil bietjie aan my eie liggaam spandeer, tyd, meer maak vir myself en minder worry oor persone wat my kan afbreek of vals persone" [ROFT: "*And then I booked myself into (mentions health care facility). I was reluctant at first, but then said to myself: 'No, book yourself in' ... Since leaving (name of health care facility), I really see the light ... I'm walking into a new job, I feel good about myself ... my mind-set has changed ... I want to spend more time on myself; less worrying about people who could disparage me*"].

Hulk was able to attain a positive attitude to help him cope with his disappointment and hurts; he especially had a positive attitude towards the future and a new outlook on life. He said, "...het ek rerig baie vriende ontmoet en baie mense wat my gemotiveer het en vir my gesê, 'maar kyk ander na jou ... jy is nie so sleg soos jy wat vir jouself wil voorgee nie' ... en dit het my net weer besef ... daar nog baie ander en baie ander wat my gaan raaksien... [mentions health care facility] toe gekom ... wonderlike mense ontmoet ... net om my te help daai emosionele hartseer te verwerk. En ek moet sê, ek is ... voel baie wonderlik vandat ek hier is, veral die mense wat ek ontmoet het". [ROFT: "*I really met a lot of new friends and people who motivated me. They told me to look at myself differently ... I am not as bad as I make myself out to be ... there are others who will notice*

*me. At (mentions health care facility) I met wonderful people ... to help me cope with my emotional hurt t... I must say. I feel wonderful about myself ... especially the people I met”].*

His sister also provided him with support during his low point (“In daai laagtepunt toe help my suster. Toe [*het*] my een suster gehelp dat ons ‘n maatskappy, via haar naam, oopmaak ... die werk is myne, ek moet dadelik inval. En daar was dit vir my klaar ‘n draaipunt”). [ROFT: “*In my low point my sister helped me. She helped me to register a company in her name. It was already a turning-point when I heard I had the job and I could start immediately*”]. Others also assisted him (“Rêrig *close* vriende geraak en hulle het net vir my ander ligpunt gegee ... So, nadat ek uit [*mentions health care facility*] uit is, sien ek rêrig die lig ...” and “... die raad wat ek by die mense gekry by ... hierso ... vir my gesê ... Dit was ‘n ‘eye opener’ ... en soos ek sê, die raad wat ek by die mense gekry het ... vir ‘n beter ‘eye opener’ kon ek nie gevra het nie. En dit is alles via ons Vader”). [ROFT: “*Really close friends gave me another perception on seeing the light ... since leaving (mentions health care facility) I really see the light ... the advice people gave me here ... That was an eye-opener: I specifically asked Him to open my eyes ... to help me to get rid of the pain. I couldn’t have asked for a better eye-opener ... it was all via our Father*”]

Hulk, through the professional support he received and in gaining a positive attitude, was able to become future and goal-orientated. He is looking forward to meeting someone who can love him in his life, start working and to pay more attention to himself. His lowest point support came from professionals, his sister, a job he obtained, and friends. Others (i.e. friends) supported him to change his outlook and helped him to become positive and happy again. Hulk booked himself into a professional facility to assist him in overcoming his negative low point experience and to help him cope with his negative emotions. He deliberately did something towards his high point experience and managed to effectively deal with his low point.

In ‘doing something’, Hulk also submitted his CV, searched for and found a job and, started his own business (“Ek het baie, kom ek stel dit so. Ek het baie gedoen. Ek het ‘n besigheid probeer ... al het ek die besigheid probeer hardloop, het ek nog werk gesoek ... Ek het my CV gaan ingee”). [ROFT: “*I did a lot ... I tried my own business, and still searched for work ... I submitted my CV*”]. Hulk booked himself into a professional facility. He also expressed his emotions, although not openly, but in privacy. His faith in God also played a role in starting to deal with his negative circumstances.

To Hulk meaning consisted of a new outlook on life, gaining confidence, coping with hurt, seeing the positive in the negative, being positive about the future regarding life in general, his work and a

potential new close relationship (“intussen gaan ek aan met my lewe ... ek is baie gelukkig ... ek is net baie meer vrylik bewegend ... beweegbaar”). [ROFT: *“In the meantime I am carrying on with my life ... I am very happy ... I’m freer to move around”*]. He obtained wisdom and gained personal growth. He said, “As ek ook hoor deur watse drama’s hulle gegaan het ... en soos hulle altyd sê, jy wil nooit ‘n ander een se pakkie hê nie, want ‘n ander een se pakkie lyk altyd erger as joune. As jy nou rêrig sien wat ander deurgegaan het, dan vat jy maar eerder ... maar weer jou seer wat jy het ... is nie jy wat verloor nie ... jy het niks verloor nie; sy het jou gelos ... sy verloor ‘n man wat vir haar lief was; so, jy wen eintlik al die pad’. En net daar het ek besef, ‘hou op treur oor haar”. [ROFT: *“You do not want to have another person’s discomforts, rather have your own ... you did not lose, she lost somebody who loved her ... you actually win all the way. Just there I stopped being sad because of her”*].

## **6.2.8 Participant 8: Limna**

### **6.2.8.1 Background information**

The researcher recruited Limna, an ex-colleague from a previous organisation where he had worked, as he remembered that she had a rags to riches story to tell. He contacted her and she agreed to participate.

### **6.2.8.2 Summary of Limna’s story**

Limna is a 41 year old African female. During the time of the interview, she was employed as a specialist in health informatics functional support. Her low points include the loss of her father at a very early age and spending most of her childhood years in poverty. They were seven children and after her father passed away, her mother had to start working to provide. This meant she had to leave her children – Limna’s older sister looked after her and her siblings. She managed to finish matric, but there was no money to pursue further studies, which was her dream. She later obtained a proper job, studied further and was able to be successful. She has a child and although her relationship with the father did not work out, she decided to provide the best she can for her child. She is currently financially independent and in a comfortable position, owning her own house. She is self-driven and aspires to be much more successful and go even further in life.

### **6.2.8.3 RoL drawing and SBIQ information**

The RoL drawing took ±20 minutes to complete. Limna did not draw a picture of a river, but only used words in blocked columns indicating her low and high points, sequenced from left to right with arrows in-between (See Appendix F). The interview session started directly after the RoL

drawing and took  $\pm 15$  minutes. Limna did not specifically mention a turning-point, but was probed by the researcher with the aspects of the research question to elaborate more on where the change started. She then provided her response.

Her description of how she understands ‘quality of life’ is as follows: “Quality of life, I think it means more than Standard of life. It involves to be happy with or without fat bank balance, however still need to be Secure financially, Good healthy, Educated”. Regarding the rating scale questions, (See Appendix D) she rated herself as **very happy**, **very religious**, and the importance of personal status, as **very important**. On the different aspect, she rated herself as follows: **Perseverance: 10; Caring: 10; Giving: 10; Positive attitude: 8; and General quality of life: 7.**

#### 6.2.8.4 Discussion of themes

In Limna’s story, the dominant themes in moving from a low point to a high point were determination/drive, independence, goal-orientated, doing something, support to, and meaning. In Limna’s story, the sub-themes in support of her main themes were realisation, positive self-thought, positive self-talk, and faith/religious belief in God.

Limna experienced extreme poverty as a low point in her life. This was as a result of losing her father and her mother struggling to provide for her and her siblings. She employed certain aspects, presented as themes in the study, to turn her situation around. Her dire situation gave rise to a need and will (drive) to change it around. For Limna, gaining financial independence was her high point experience. In her storytelling it became clear that she was motivated by her need for independence. As a single mother, Limna had to take care of herself, her child and other family members. Considering her background circumstances of being very dependent due to poverty, it was understandable that she would not want to be overly dependent on others anymore and would want to become independent. She found comfort in being independent, especially financially. She said, “I’m more independent. I’m on my own. It’ where now I show my skills. I think, I’m not where I wanted to be in life, but I’m comfortable. I’m a specialist, I plan. I don’t want to make mistake like my parents done. I am happy where I’m now. I’ve got my own house ... big house and I’m planning to do more things for me in life. So, I think that is my journey”).

Limna was driven to achieve and to buy things they never had as children. She compared her circumstances with those of others (“We grew up in that environment, we don’t have father, we don’t have mother, but at least we know she is trying to come for us ... So, you look at people in the area and see how lucky are they, they have the radio. Even the radio, we didn’t have money to buy, it was a luxury to us. That’s why I said, ‘okay, if I study and get something ... qualification at least,

I will be able to sustain my family and get everything that we wanted when we grow up”). She was driven to pursue independence by finishing matric, obtaining a job and a higher education qualification, enabling her to provide for her child and family. Limna received support from her mother, sister and brother during her upbringing. Later on the support provided from being employed would be the starting point for changing her circumstances. Limna also had the urge to provide support to others, in her case her family, in an effort to change her past negative circumstances.

Limna acted by ‘doing something’ to get away from the low point (i.e. poverty) experience. She took responsibility and finished matric, looked for a job and found one, and saved money to study further. She would later on take care of herself, her mother, her child and others. She was goal-directed to move closer to her high point aspiration of being independent and being able to buy what she did not have as a child. For her, taking responsibility was an important part of moving away from poverty (“a wonderful daughter that I’m looking forward in life and I want her to not grow the same as I grow up ... But she is enjoying life, [*unclear – more than I enjoying it*]. I make sure of that ... So, it’s where I started. If I’m supporting my family, even with the little money that I can put aside”).

Limna talked to herself about studying and how it would positively help her in future. She said, “I said, ‘okay, if I study and get something ... qualification at least, I will be able to sustain my family and get everything that we wanted when we grow up’”. Limna also indicated that she talked positively and felt proud about the fact that she could financially support her mother to expand her house (“I was a [*mentions position in organisation*] and not earning much. But I told myself, ‘I will support my family’. So, I said my mom must stop working now, and then I started to extend our two room house, so we had a three bedroom house. I extended it to three bedrooms: dining room, sitting room, kitchen ... proper kitchen. And then I was so proud of myself”).

Limna was strongly goal-orientated, which was evident through all she aspired to achieve, (“When I joined the [*mentions organisation’s name*], but it was not enough, I couldn’t go anywhere with a matric and experience. So, it’s where I started ... so that I can start registering and improving myself. And improving my education as well. So ... I said, ‘okay, if I study and get something... qualification at least, I will be able to sustain my family and get everything that we wanted when we grow up’ ... it was like now it’s something totally different”). Limna obtained wisdom through her experience and renders advice to others (“...don’t feel sorry, don’t make an excuse for being poor... they must do something about it”). She has found meaning in being able to support herself and

others. She is financially comfortable, happy and positive about the future (“I’ve got my own house... big house and I’m planning to do more things for me in life”).

Limna confessed that in being able to move from her low point to her high point, she was thankful to God (“I thank God every day; He gives me strength”). Limna kept hope alive during her upbringing, which helped her later in life when she wanted to improve herself and stay positive in the expectation of realising her dreams. For her, the situation turned around when she was able to afford further studies (“It’s when I started saving for my tertiary, because I had a matric ... I couldn’t go anywhere with a matric and experience. So, it’s where I started. If I’m supporting my family, even with the little money that I can put aside, so that I can start registering and improving myself. And improving my education as well. So...”).

## **6.2.9 Participant 9: M**

### **6.2.9.1 Background information**

M was recruited through the gatekeeper organisation responsible for identifying upcoming athletes that has the potential of becoming elite athletes. M presented herself as a very open-minded person with a positive demeanour. Her RoL drawing was colourful, artistic, and creative (i.e. representing action). She elaborated amply during the interview session and spoke very passionately about her sport.

### **6.2.9.2 Summary of M’s story**

M is a 30 year old White self-employed female with her own business. During the time of the interview, she owned her own swim school. She was an athlete from a young age, who was dedicated, motivated and hard working in achieving her goal to become a national senior athlete. Her low point occurred while she was doing very well as an athlete and had the opportunity to fulfil a childhood dream – she suffered a major setback by not being selected for the Olympics national team due to a sports injury. However, she managed to bounce back and recovered slowly but surely. She has reached a higher point than before and is continuing to move in confidence towards her ‘dream’ high point in sport. M is very passionate about her sport and goal orientated. She seems very self-driven and aspires to be even more successful in her sporting career by competing in the Olympics.



### 6.2.9.3 RoL drawing and SBIQ information

The RoL drawing took  $\pm 20$  minutes to complete. Her drawing represented a roller-coaster ride with the beginning in her childhood years (i.e. having sport dreams and loving her sport, going through growing up (i.e. working hard and having support regarding her sport) to reach a high point, but then ‘falling down’ (i.e. not being selected for the national team). In the end, the ride moved up again and she reached a higher point than before (i.e. selected for the national team and captaining it). She used colourful pictures and words to describe her story (See Appendix F). The interview session started directly after the RoL drawing and took  $\pm 19$  minutes. M did not specifically mention a turning-point, but through a detailed description of her experience from the low to the high point, it was quite clear where the change started.

Her description of how she understands ‘quality of life’ is as follows: “Quality of life to me means all the things that make you as an individual happy. The measurement of what makes your life content, satisfied and best for you”. Regarding to the rating scale questions (See Appendix D) she rated herself as **happy**, **neutrally religious**, and as **neutral** in terms of the importance of personal status. On the different aspects she rated herself as follows: **Perseverance: 8/9; Caring: 8/9; Giving: 8/9; Positive attitude: 8/9; and General quality of life: 8/9.**

### 6.2.9.4 Discussion of themes

In M’s story, the dominant themes in moving from a low point to a high point were acceptance, realisation (taking responsibility), introspection (self-thought/self-talk: positive analysing), passion/drive, perseverance, support from, doing something, and meaning. In M’s story, the sub-themes in support of her main themes were challenge, gratitude, fun and humour.

M’s low point was not being chosen for the national team to participate at the Olympics. This was her dream and due to injury, she was not included. There were various aspects present in her life to assist her in overcoming her disappointment and move towards a high point. M accepted her situation and the negatives associated with it and started dealing with it. She said, “Don’t rush it, accept that there’s a disappointment. Don’t sweep it under the mat and deal with it. Her awareness of how things were slowly changing was also noteworthy (“And so, slowly but surely... Don’t rush it... I started to become a stronger person and it helped me in my sport... And so it started off little and I was stronger and I was faster... And eventually...”). After her big disappointment, she realised what was important in her life. She needed to re-prioritise. She said, “I’ve been at the rock-bottom. I’ve had the worst happen to me ... And then, eventually, I had to find the balance hitting rock bottom, that my life is also great and the sport makes it great, and that balance is also very

important ... now my sport is just fantastic, I have no insecurities. I have no doubts in my mind and I'm content with whatever happens ... I realised that anything that happens is a bonus to me ... even with the hugest disappointment of my life, it made me realise how, that, every opportunity that I get, is a huge bonus and this is a part of my life, it's not my life ... My family and [*mentions husband's name*], they are my life and I have an amazing life. And all those things are so good and my sport is a connection to it and it makes me happy".

M realised her own self-worth and passion for sport, which provided her the opportunity to take responsibility for her circumstances and decide what to do about it. In M's storytelling, introspection was a very dominant theme. She had questions and in reasoning with herself, she concluded that she was the one who had to do something about her situation, even if it meant grabbing opportunities on the way. She said, "I've got to start looking within me ... instead of looking outwards, start looking inwards at yourself and what you can do to make yourself better and how you can start moving forward. From the introspection in M's storytelling, it was clear that she was very aware of herself within her situation and what she needed to do about it in order to create change. She became aware that the sport was receiving too much attention, to the point that it was controlling her life, and it therefore became important to her to have a balance in her life between her love for her sport and the rest of her life. M realised she had to take action to change her circumstances. She took the responsibility on herself to make the changes possible and seize opportunities that may come her way. She said, "And then... taking responsibility for it, and saying, 'okay, what do I want to do now, do I still love what I'm doing, do I still want to do it'?"

M's positive self-thought was visible through analysing her thoughts, pondering about the questions she had, and then finding positive solutions and answers to them. Positive self-thought led to coping positively with her disappointment and doubts, having grown personally and being confident ("all the questions, the whys, and the not-fairs, and the blaming-everybody-else ... eventually I just started breaking it down myself [*accentuates*]"). During the positive self-thought process, M also talked positively to herself to express the solutions to her questions and circumstances about what could be done to bring about a positive outcome ("I am good enough, now I've got to prove to myself and to the selectors or whomever that I've got to get back there and I can't be pointing fingers at everybody and I've got to start looking within me' ... And I started saying, 'okay, what am I going to do now?' ... I always say to myself, 'because it's... that's what had to help me over here too, is that, like, it's always just been the sport and it's controlled my life... And I do love it'").

M's whole description of dealing with her disappointment was characterised by having a positive attitude. Through positive self-thought, self-talk, and analysing her situation she could arrive at a

positive outcome (“And with this disappointment, it actually made me even a stronger person, ‘cause I could deal with anything. I mean, if I could get so heartbroken by something that I love, then ... there’s nothing that can hurt me even more. So, if I go into this whole thing again, it’s a bonus if I start doing well, because I’ve been at the rock-bottom. I’ve had the worst happen to me. The worst thing possible that they can take away from me has happened ... I started to become a stronger person”). M was determined to do something about the negative low point situation she was in – she accepted the situation and started dealing with it. She allowed herself the feelings associated with the low point experience, started analysing the situation, looked within herself for answers, took responsibility and started dealing with it bit-by-bit. She then made a decision about participating in her sport and started training hard in the gym and grabbed opportunities that came her way.

Furthermore, M was motivated by small achievements in her turning-point experience, as well as the love for her sport. In her experience, the process was gradual (i.e. slowly-but-surely and step-by-step). She determined what she wanted to do, made the decision and followed through. M’s passion and love for sport was prominent in her story of being able to move from her low point to the high point. This passion have been with her for years and involved strong emotions of loving her sport, enjoying it, having fun, being happy, thinking her life is amazing, having feelings of greatness and admiration. She said, “And then ... taking responsibility for it, and saying, ‘okay, what do I want to do now, do I still love what I’m doing, do I still want to do it? I am good enough, now I’ve got to prove to myself and to the selectors or whomever that I’ve got to get back there and I can’t be pointing fingers at everybody and I’ve got to start looking within me. Is this what I really wanted to do?’ And then I made the decision”.

M was dream-driven. From a young age, she had big dreams and expectations of herself concerning sport. Her dream was to compete at international level. This dream was almost shattered by her low point experience, but she kept on dreaming and was able to get back on track towards her high point once again (“So then, obviously as a kid, I [*unclear*] and I had big dreams and expectations for myself ... which got me there ... this is your dream, you want to do it... It’s still my... like, my long lost dream. Another important realisation that M made was to find the positive in the negative and make use of opportunity. She said, “just this little disappointment mustn’t make it as big as what it is and then I can overcome it and that I can maybe reach it again, I can get there ... And with this disappointment, it actually made me even a stronger person”). M made an early decision in her life that she wanted to participate in sport. Later on, as an older person and after her low point, she re-confirmed her decision to participate. M also indicated that through perseverance her life was more

fulfilling. She said, "... and it was a challenge for me. And every time I made that challenge, conquered those challenges, it was like fulfilment ... this is great. Being here is amazing ... And I do love it and it's something built in me. I can't stop it. It's just what I want to do all the time". M indicated that part of her motivation to perform in sport was that she liked to challenge herself, as it was fulfilling ("Because I was around people that made me happy and it was a challenge for me. And every time I made that challenge, conquered those challenges, it was like fulfilment. It was like, 'yoh, this is good. I love this, this is great'").

M's family and friends supported her participation in sport. She could rely on her husband and family to assist her in overcoming her negative low point experience ("Because I was around people that made me happy ... And a lot of that support came from [*mentions husband's name*], who is my husband now. Like my big, big rock who helped me and he didn't push it. He just like, let me deal with it ... And my family as well, who supported me right from the beginning... continued to support me and said, 'come let's do it, this is your dream, you want to do it, and these are the things that we do'. So, little by little and with the help of my family and with [*mentions husband's name*] and myself

M has found meaning through a lesson she learned in life: she re-discovered her passion for and the importance of sport in her life, but also that she had a life with others, such as her husband and family members. She has developed as a sportsperson and became more confident in making decisions ("I realised that anything that happens is a bonus to me. So, I can't get more disappointed than what I've already been ... And I got to the camp and I'm better than ever and just enjoyed it. And eventually they chose me as captain because of my development that I made and how I'd become as a person. Just like, not insecure about decisions and about, am I good enough and all that self-doubt that, when I was younger, that I might have had"). She found personal growth and strength through sport ("And it might be sport, but it's actually helped me grow as a person and helped me, like, you know ... like, become stronger and appreciate things more ... I started to become a stronger person and it helped me in my sport").

Her wisdom to others on how to deal with a low point/disappointment is: "break it down. Don't rush it, accept that there's a disappointment. Don't sweep it under the mat and deal with it. Be angry, and be disappointed, and be bitter, and cry yourself to sleep, and just get that through. And then, slowly start, instead of looking outwards, start looking inwards at yourself and what you can do to make yourself better and how you can start moving forward". She further suggests that one takes charge of the situation ("it's only you that fix this and it's only you that can get better. And it's only you that can make a difference from this. Nobody else" and then do something about it

(“Whether it’s in life to overcome it and start stretching your arms out and grabbing opportunities that you have ... So ... eventually I just trained harder. I ‘gymed’ harder. I got better. I got faster... And so it started off little and I was stronger and I was faster ... if I go for it and it’s a bonus. And I’m going to try my hardest for it and if I get it, it’s a dream come true).

M has been able to cope with her negative emotions relating to her sport. She took time to recognise and analyse her negative emotions experienced within the situation. She had help from her husband and family and her positive feelings and love for the sport also contributed significantly in helping her cope. Keeping busy in training, working hard and achieving again, further bolstered her positive emotions; she was happy and have found meaning in her disappointment. M elaborated on how much fun she had participating in sport from a young age, and that it was this positive experience that had led to her loving the sport so much; this would become one of the major reasons why she participated in sport.

This love for sport also helped her to manage her low point experience and persist towards her high point experience. Sport made her happy and it was satisfying to her to be around others who were also happy doing sport. This was also very fulfilling to her (“I had so much fun, so, maybe the fun and the love kind of, it was ... it’s made me happy, because I was having so much fun with my friends and my family. So, that was kind of the love of it). Humorously regarding her husband’s support she said, “And then, eventually, when I was being a little bit pathetic about it [*laughs*], he kind of gave me a kick-up-my-bum and said, ‘come now, what do you want to do? If this is what you want to do, then let’s make it work ... let’s do it’”.

M was very grateful for all that she had achieved in her life regarding sport, as well as regarding her experiences. She appreciated things more, grew personally and became stronger to handle her negative low point experiences (“And I’m very grateful for how far I’ve come. And I’m so fortunate to have experienced all of it that... And it might be sport, but it’s actually helped me grow as a person and helped me, like, you know... like, become stronger and appreciate things more”). M also found meaning in seeing how amazing various aspects of her life were, valuing it more positively as well as appreciating what she has. She also is contented with her situation currently.

#### **6.2.10 Participant 10: Kim**

##### **6.2.10.1 Background information**

Kim was not a young and upcoming athlete, but known to the provincial representative of the gatekeeper organisation in her professional capacity. The representative was also involved in an

organisation, which reaches out and is responsible for empowering vulnerable individuals from impoverished communities, also offering counselling and therapy to survivors of abuse. Due to the sensitive nature of her story, the researcher let Kim talk without interruptions. Although she indicated that she has not reached her ultimate high point yet and still became emotional at times, she indicated that she has reached smaller high points after her low point experience. In having found some meaning already, it indicated that she had found a suitable and significant high point to still qualify for the study.

#### **6.2.10.2 Summary of Kim's story**

Kim is a 22 year old Coloured woman who works as a receptionist. During the time of the interview, she was out of her low point and in the process of recovering from what happened to her in the past. She was a survivor of sexual abuse and exposed to a world of prostitution and drug use. Kim was also exposed to death threats and at a stage, held captive against her will, unable to leave at own free will. However, she managed to escape these circumstances, and was now cared for by others who supported her recovery, helped her to overcome her past and to live a new life. She has indicated that she has not reached her desired or ultimate high point yet, but for her to have been able to come out of the situation in which she was, is seen as an achievement of success. She also indicated that she has made some progress towards her high point through small achievements, amongst others in being able to share her story with another (i.e. the unknown current researcher). This was an indication that she could trust another in spite of what happened to her and that she was brave enough to talk about her upsetting experience(s).

#### **6.2.10.3 RoL drawing and SBIQ information**

The RoL drawing took  $\pm 30$  minutes to complete. Kim wrote sentences/phrases in blocked columns indicating her low points, summarising her experiences by year and ending on a high point. They were sequenced in a circular format from bottom left to right and upwards, coming back to the top left separated with arrows in-between (See Appendix F). The interview session started directly after the RoL drawing and took  $\pm 32$  minutes. Kim did not specifically mention a turning-point, but it was clear that the escape from her circumstances could be a significant turning-point. She was, however, probed by the researcher with the aspects of the research question to elaborate about this point, to which she responded with her story.

Her description of how she understands 'quality of life' is as follows: "Quality of life means to be happy, to live your life and make a success of your life. To help others reach for their goals. Mostly for me is to be myself and be happy for myself and for others". In terms of the rating scale

questions (See Appendix D) she rated herself as **happy**, **religious**, and the importance of personal status, as **very important**. On the different aspects, she rated herself as follows: **Perseverance: 9; Caring: 10; Giving: 10; Positive attitude: 10; and General quality of life: 10.**

#### 6.2.10.4 Discussion of themes

In Kim's story, the dominant themes to move from a low point to a high point were honesty (to self), positive self-thought, positive self-talk, personal strength/survival/perseverance, support from, doing something, and meaning. In Kim's story, the sub-themes in support of her main themes were faith/religious beliefs (praying) and forgiveness.

Kim's lowest point was being in a life-threatening confinement situation of prostitution and death threats. She indicated that her low point started when she was quite young and had stay with her grandmother. She did not do well in school, dropped out and ended up working as a prostitute. Although Kim indicated that she had not yet reached her highest point yet, she was able to escape her lowest point and have moved significantly from her original low point. There were aspects present in Kim's life that helped her move beyond her low points. She has also managed to attain certain achievements and meaning in her life, indicating various high points, including the birth of her daughter, after-school qualifications, finding a job, and receiving professional support and care after trauma. This was portrayed in her RoL drawing. She does not focus on her dark past, but looks forward towards a bright future.

Kim's acceptance of her situation was involuntary, as she had no other choice at certain stages of her low point experience. Her acceptance of her own dignity as a human being, and what was humanely acceptable to her, became visible through the fact that she did not totally accept that she would be in her situation indefinitely. She indicated that she wanted to escape and that she had to do something. She especially did not give up on the idea that she would one day be able to 'escape' and kept on praying. She also 'played along' at certain stages to avoid more grievous situations. At times she had accepted her fate, but once she was provided the opportunity, she escaped. She said, "Ek wou uitgekome het. My plan was, soos ek nog langer gebly het, dan sou ek maar [*unclear*] ... Of ek moet maar ook 'n vrou geword het van hom, of iets, maar ek moes iets gedoen het ... en ek het net elke áánd gebid [*accentuates*]. Elke aand gebid ... maar ek het nie nog baie gedrink nie. Ek het net gemaak, like, ek is nou klaar 'out', nê ... net om te kyk." [ROFT: "*I wanted to get out. My plan was, if I had to stay ... to also become his wife, but I had to do something ... I just prayed every night, every night I prayed ... but I didn't drink much, I just pretended that I was already out, just to see*"].

Kim's positive self-thought was evident in her positive thoughts, even forgiving her perpetrator everything after arriving home after her ordeal. Kim's positive self-talk followed her positive self-thought. It helped her to follow through with her escape and contributed to her gaining personal strength. Kim was honest with herself about being able to forgive her perpetrator once being able to escape. She realised that she would be so relieved once she was removed from her low point experience, that she could be capable of forgiving someone that hurt her. She said, "al wat op my *mind* gewees het, was as ek veilig kom by die huis, dan vergewe ek daai man aan alles wat hy vir my gedoen het ... ek was net eerlik". [ROFT: "... *all that was on my mind was, that if I arrive safely at home, then I will forgive that man everything he did to me ... I was just honest*"].

Although Kim was still coping with her emotions, she has moved forward in this regard by having someone (i.e. a professional as well as a friend) who she could talk to. She also showed progress through the attainment of achievements, having a proper job and having obtained meaning as a result of her experiences, although lacking in happiness. She said, "Ek het iemand ge-ontmoet. Ek het vir [*mentions name of non-profit organisations representative*] ge-ontmoet. Dit is ... iets wat ek kan sê wat my sterk gemaak het ... Toe het [*mentions name of non-profit organisations representative*] ge-betaal vir my om [*office administration*] te *study* by [*mentions college name*]. Toe kom ek nou uit; toe is ek by die *college* ... Ek het *computer course*, ek het *office administration*, ek het *certificate in basic counselling*, ek het baie goete al ge-*achieve*, maar ek het nog nie by daai punt uitgekom waar ek *happy* is nie ... Ek myself *happy* is ... Ek was ... en ek was baie swak. Ek het baie gehuil. Ná al die, is ek 'actually' sterk. Ek huil nie meer óór dit nie". [ROFT: "*I met someone – the non-profit organisation's representative ... that is something that I can say has made me strong ... then she paid for me to study office administration at the college ... then I came out; I was at the college ... I have a computer course ... I have office administration ... I have a certificate in basic counselling. I have achieved a lot but I am not at the point of being (totally) happy ... I was very weak ... cried a lot, but after all I am actually strong ... I don't cry about it anymore*"].

Kim persevered throughout the ordeal in her life. She had the will to get out of her circumstances and kept on praying in spite of her being held there against her will. She also did not return, once she was able to escape ("Ek wou uitgekom het. My plan was, soos ek nog langer gebly het, dan sou ek maar [*unclear*], want daar is nie 'n ander way uit nie. Daar is nie 'n ander ... ander way uit nie"). [ROFT: "*My plan was ... there was no other way out ... there was no ... no other way out*"]. Kim had the support from the gatekeeper organisation's representative to assist her in overcoming her negative past experience. She provided Kim with the necessary professional help to regain her dignity as a human being and to obtain educational achievements and a job after her ordeal. She



witnessed: “Ná al die, is ek *actually* sterk ... So, dis waarvan ek sê was [mentions gatekeeper organisation representative’s name] ... want niemand het my so, so ge-‘treat’ soos [mentions gatekeeper organisation representative’s name] my ge-‘treat’ het nie, en my in haar huis in gevat en nie my ge-‘judge’ op wat ek deurgegaan het en so nie”. [ROFT: “*After all this time I am actually strong ... I met [mentions gatekeeper organisation representative’s name] ... this is who made me strong ... Nobody has treated me like [mentions gatekeeper organisation representative’s name] had ... she took me into her home and did not judge me about what I went through*”].

Kim did a few things to escape from her negative low point experience. She could not directly do something to leave, but had to indirectly make use of an opportunity that presented itself. However, as a religious person she prayed every night and kept out of trouble with her perpetrator, although she tried to talk to him about the fact that what he was doing was wrong. She also did not return to the low point situation, once she was able to come out of it. Kim received professional support and shared her story with the professional to move towards her high point. She studied further and started working to enable her to keep on moving towards her ultimate high point.

Kim found meaning in her life through her experiences by becoming stronger and having words of wisdom and advice to others. A high point for her was the birth of her child and a renewed (positive) future-orientated outlook on life. Meaning in Kim’s life also implied having learned something and being wiser. Her words of wisdom to young people, who found themselves in similar circumstances to hers, was to rather go to school (“Ek sal sê om eerder skoolgaan. Nou wat ek kwalifikasies ook het, en ek kyk net so vir ander werk ... matriek ... so ek sal sê, ‘maak skool eerste klaar. Al die goed in die wêreld in *clubs*, die *fashion*, sulke goed ... Dit gaan uit die mode uit. Dit gaan ... in die ouma se dae was dit ook *clubs* gewees [unclear] en goeters ... en is dit nou nog steeds. So daai goeters gaan nie uit die *fashion* nie, maar jou skoolloopbaan moet jy eerste voltooi”). [ROFT: “*Rather go to school and finish matric. Now that I have qualifications ... work ... matric ... Clubs and fashion go out of fashion, first complete your school career!*”]. She would further advise young girls about going out at night and being approached by the wrong guys: “Bly weg. *Even* nog steeds dan gaan ons uit, miskien *weekends*. Dan sê die meisies, miskien in die vriendekring in, ‘wag ons gaan daar by daai ou gaan sit, dan moet hy vir ons drank koop’ en goeters ... Dan sê ek, ‘ek gaan nou sommer huistoe gaan ... ek gaan sommer huistoe’. Jy weet nie *actually* wat is daai man se plan met jou nie. En [unclear] dan is dit iets anders”. [ROFT: “*Stay away. Even now when we go out perhaps on weekends, the girls say they are going to sit by a guy, then they will ask him to buy them drinks ... then I say: ‘I’m going home’. You do not know what that guy is planning for you. And then it might be something else*”].

In retrospect, she also now understood what her grandmother meant when she warned her as a youngster: “En nog ‘n ding wat my ouma altyd vir my gesê het, toe ek nog jonk gewees het ... en my suster was by die werk ... nou gaan wag ek vir my suster by die hoek, as sy uit die werk uit met haar pakkies ... Toe het my ouma my altyd geskel van die hoekgewaggery [*meaning: ‘prostitute wat op die hoek staan’*]. Maar ek het nie geweet waarvan praat sy nie [*unclear*] ... outyds. ‘n Mens kan ook nie vir jou suster gaan wag nie, dis outyds en goeters. Tot ek dit ge-*experience* het”. [ROFT: “*Another thing that my grandmother used to say when I was young ... and my sister was at work ... I went to wait for her at the street corner when she came home ... my grandmother used to scold me about this ‘corner-waiting’ ... I didn’t know what she meant, I thought it was old-fashioned ... until I have experienced it*”].

### **6.2.11 Participant 11: Cate**

#### **6.2.11.1 Background information**

Cate was identified by and recruited via the gatekeeper organisation. She was also an upcoming athlete and identified to excel in sport and reach her maximum potential. Cate presented herself as an open-minded person and spoke with confidence. She provided rich information on how she overcame injury and her setback with a strong emphasis on how much she loved doing sport.

#### **6.2.11.2 Summary of Cate’s story**

Cate is a 23 year old White woman who is a student. She has been achieving in sport since high school and was selected for the national team. Her low point was when she suffered a setback when she was injured in a horse-riding accident after school. However, she managed to rehabilitate and bounce back by representing South Africa again in sport as a member of the national team. In the meantime, she has continued with tertiary studies. Her sporting successes include having obtained various medals. She is keen to achieve even more in her sporting career and regularly practises her sport, which she feels very passionate about.

#### **6.2.11.3 RoL drawing and SBIQ information**

The RoL drawing took ±15 minutes to complete. Cate drew a picture of a river with a few turns flowing out between two hills towards the front, but widening towards the end. She numbered important events, which she described in words alongside the river, indicating her low, and high points (See Appendix F). The interview session started directly after the RoL drawing and took ±23 minutes. Cate did not specifically mention a turning-point, but was probed by the researcher to

indicate what her involvement was in the turning around of her situation. She then provided an answer.

Her description of how she understands 'quality of life' is as follows: "A good quality of life is to be happy with yourself. To be positive and make the best of whatever situation you are in. To live life to the fullest and reach your full potential". In terms of the rating scale questions (See Appendix D) she rated herself as **happy**, **very religious**, and the importance of personal status, as **important**. On the different aspects, she rated herself as follows: **Perseverance: 10; Caring: 8; Giving: 7; Positive attitude: 9; and General quality of life: 9.**

#### **6.2.11.4 Discussion of themes**

In Cate's story, the dominant themes from a low point to a high point were faith/religious belief in God, realisation, acceptance, positive self-thought (outlook), passion/competitiveness, drive/motivation, support from, doing something, and meaning. In Cate's story, the sub-themes in support of her main themes were humour and appreciation

Cate's low point was sustaining quite a serious injury that prevented her from participating in sport. In order to move beyond her low point, she employed certain aspects presented as themes in this study. Cate was very good at sports from an early age, but after school and during the stage of her serious injury, she realised that she had to re-prioritise the importance of sport and where it would fit into her life. She would discover herself as a person who could live without sport, but later on rediscovered she was still very passionate about it. In working through her disappointments, she was able to even improve her sport performance. Cate also indicated that she accepted her situation even if it meant she couldn't participate in sport again. After acceptance she could start moving on. She said, "In sports there's a lot of disappointments ... poor performance or an injury or illness just before a big competition. And ... you just ... can't like dwell on it ... And then, I was like well, there's nothing I can do to change this situation. I've just got to make the best of it now ... and, ja like, my focus was on just recovering".

Cate's positive self-thought was in terms of believing in herself and others, mentally working through her disappointments, appreciating what she could do and being positive. Cate's positive self-thought, belief in herself and her coach, and positive outlook indicated a positive attitude towards her negative low point experience and helped her in reaching her high points ("... and then you've got to believe in yourself and you've got to believe in your training programme, and your coach ... I think ... and then when you have setbacks ... everybody does ... and there's disappointments, but it's how you handle them that's what's important. And if you can work

through those ... afterwards, you're actually stronger and ... mentally ... I actually look at my sport now and I think, if I do badly in a race or whatever ... At one stage I thought my sports career was over, now I'm still able to compete at such a high level. So, if I've done badly in the race, it's nothing actually. It's you know ... just that I'm able to go out there and do what I love. It's changed the way that I think ... You've just got to make the best of ... what situation you're in").

Cate also had passion and love for sport. It was a very big part of her life. It seemed that this passion has endured throughout her injury and led to her ability to move out of her low point and also in reaching her high point. She loved sport, was very committed to practice, and driven to perform and reach goals. Sport helped her to escape from frustrations and release tension; she loved being outdoors and enjoyed the effortlessness, achievement and absolute pleasure sport offered. She said, "Sports is like such a huge part of my life and I love it so much ... I'd say, 'you need to do what you love', because, I mean, for me training is an absolute pleasure. So, 'find what you're good at and what you enjoy and then you just set yourself goals and then work towards achieving them'".

Cate set herself goals to reach. Although small at first, they grew to become bigger as she re-built her strength. She loves having goals and strives hard to attain them. She said, "And the big thing for me, as well, is 'setting yourself small goals first'. Because, if you look and ... with my [*mentions her sport*], I still need to improve [*mentions the activity*] a lot. It's my weakest discipline. I want to improve by 2 minutes ... which is a lot if I want to be competitive internationally ... you've first got to set small goals. And then once you achieve those, it starts. That big goals starts looking like its more realistic. It's one step at a time, don't get overwhelmed by what you, where you've got to go ... and then you've got to believe in yourself and you've got to believe in your training programme, and your coach".

Cate was driven to participate in sport. It made her feel loved, and she liked to compete, travel, set goals and achieve them, and gain confidence. This was fulfilling and extremely pleasurable to her ("What drives you? I think, I've always been involved in sport right from when I was young ... I just love being outdoors and it's 'what made you feel loved' ... and love racing and competing and travelling and setting goals and working towards them and achieving them. It's awesome ... it's just the best feeling. Like, ja. I love it so that's what keeps me going every day").

Cate was able to persevere throughout her period of serious injury, having to rehabilitate and making a comeback to participate on international level. During rehabilitation she continued studying. She prayed and received an answer from God via a fellow believer, to persist in doing sport. She started training slowly and then harder, after dealing with her uncertainties. She set

herself goals and then pursued them to finally accomplish the extraordinary: competing at international level. Cate also indicated that she loves to compete and was very competitive. She missed it during her injured period. She said, “The injuries felt so bad it’s like ... how am I ever ... I didn’t even think about competing again, I just thought ... just to be able to run and to just do that”.

Cate received support from her family in staying at home while recovering from her injuries. In terms of background support, she was a Christian and found support through her faith and religious beliefs, in the form of another person praying for her in church. Needing clarity about her future, she posed questions to God, and was provided answers through this person. She believed God had a plan for her life; she could stop worrying and it was all right for her to enjoy her sport, which she would later do even while she was still recovering from her injury. She was then able to find acceptance associated with less worries, along with starting to practise her sport again. She further found help in overcoming her negative low experience through the support of friends and her coach, who helped her to train and perform effectively, to reach a high point once again. She also gained belief in herself and appreciated the fact that she was able to do sport again. Her faith in God formed an important part in describing her turning-point experience. She said, “... because I’m a Christian and, you know, I believe that God’s got a plan for my life and everything ... I think the best turning-point was actually, when I went for prayer and I had been praying ... for a long time and ... even before the horse-riding accident happened, right? Just ... ‘what Your plans are ... what must I do? ... what do You want me to do with my life?’. I didn’t know also like what ... with my future life ... what to do like, even with my studies and everything. So, ja, then ... I went actually ... to church and I had prayer for healing for my injuries and, the lady that was praying for me just said like, ‘I just feel that God is telling ... So, when she said that and she said to me, ... ‘God loves to watch you enjoying your sport’ ... and that He’s got this plan for your life and you don’t need to worry ... And it was amazing, because that’s what I’d been praying for the whole time, you know ... and then ... it just was really great to hear. And then I stopped worrying so much. And it was about three months after the accident, I started a little bit of running and cycling and everything”.

Regarding ‘doing something’, Cate studied during her rehabilitation period. She also acted in faith, by praying to God for answers and going to church. After getting an answer, she started training hard, focussing and getting fit (“When I started again I did a lot of rehab in the gym just to strengthen everything and when once the rehab was over, I started ... with my coach, he really helped me get back into it”). She actively put in an effort to move away from her low point experience towards her new high point experience. Through small steps, her love and passion for

her sport, as well as persistence, she was able to reach her high point. Cate meaningfully gained personal growth (“So, I’ve found like actually this accident ... I’ve come out of it a better athlete”), a positive outlook (“when you have setbacks ... everybody does ... and there’s disappointments, but it’s how you handle them that’s what’s important. And if you can work through those, you’re actually ... afterwards, you’re actually stronger and ... mentally”), wisdom (“You’ve just got to make the best of ... what situation you’re in ... in sports there’s a lot of disappointments. You know, poor performance or an injury or illness just before a big competition. And, ja, you just ... can’t like dwell on it ... I think I’ve learnt to handle setbacks a lot better ... when I was younger”) and spiritual self-transcendence. In respect of the latter and in following her religious experience, Cate was able to move beyond her negative low point experience towards her high point experience: She moved from a point where she thought she would never participate professionally in sport again, to competing internationally and winning a medal one year later (“At one stage I thought my sports career was over, now I’m still able to compete at such a high level ... It’s changed the way that I think”). Cate, as a sport person, gained meaningful wisdom and the ability to handle setbacks. This involved doing what she loved, setting herself small goals first, then bigger ones, and believing in herself, her coach and training program.

Cate also displayed some humour regarding her turning-point experience, joking about her passion for her sport and in slowly starting to become stronger again (“I mean sport is... it’s such a huge part of my life and I think I’ve got a behavioural disorder of exercise addiction [*laughs loudly*] ... And at that stage too, like, I had just finished my studies and had nothing to do [*laughs*] ... Like, I was in a gym every day doing ... started with stupid little exercises [*laughs*]. I’m so used to doing all these, you know, hectic exercises and started with stupid little things. Like, just doing that for your wrist”).

Cate’s appreciation for being able to participate in sport was visible, and regarded by her as a blessing (“... but I’m actually just so blessed that I can actually just do this”). She was pleased, thought it was amazing and had less worries as a result thereof (“And it was amazing, because that’s what I’d been praying for the whole time, you know, just ... and then ... it just was really great to hear. And then I stopped worrying so much ... but I’m actually just so blessed that I can actually just do this”).

## 6.2.12 Participant 12: Chad

### 6.2.12.1 Background information

Chad was recruited via the gatekeeper organisation's representative, but not as an upcoming athlete. The participant met the criteria of having a significant low and high point, and as the gatekeeper representative knew that this participant had such a story to tell, he recommended him for the study. Chad was very decent, well mannered, soft spoken and presented himself as someone who could not be easily angered.

### 6.2.12.2 Summary of Chad's story

Chad is a 39 year old African male who is employed as a correctional services officer. He had a good life as a child, but it changed when they relocated and during the following year, his parents got divorced. This was his low point and it happened when he was twelve years old. His mother left and he remained staying with his father. In the process he was also separated from his younger sister. Circumstances were dismal with insufficient money available to them. Chad had a few unsuccessful relationships in searching for love. He managed to get a job after school and he got married. His marriage was in jeopardy at a stage, but he received professional help to assist and allow him to begin moving away from the low point in his life.

### 6.2.12.3 RoL drawing and SBIQ information

The RoL drawing took  $\pm 15$  minutes to complete. Chad did not draw a river, but instead presented a time line, from bottom left to top right, with descriptions of events that stood out, indicating his low and high points (See Appendix F). The interview session started directly after the RoL drawing and took  $\pm 32$  minutes. Chad did not specifically mention a turning-point, but was probed by the researcher with the aspects of the research question to indicate where the change started. He did not respond immediately, but later on the indicated where change started happening.

His description of how he understands 'quality of life' is as follows: "Quality of life to me will mean things that happen to your past life and you learned from them and use them positively in your current life and in future. This, I believe is the quality of life we need. To learn from our mistakes and to correct for the future". With regard to the rating scale questions (See Appendix D) he rated himself as **happy**, **religious**, and the importance of personal status, as **very important**. On the different aspects, he rated himself as follows: **Perseverance: 9; Caring: 10; Giving: 9; Positive attitude: 9; and General quality of life: 8.**

#### 6.2.12.4 Discussion of themes

In Chad's story, the dominant themes in moving from a low point to a high point were realisation/awareness, looking for love, positive self-talk, being honest, motivation/dream/goal/future orientated, support from, faith/belief/religion (God), forgiveness, doing something, and meaning. In Chad's story, the unique theme in support of his main themes was support to.

Certain aspects in Chad's life enabled him to move away from his low point experience of his parent's divorce, were presented as themes in his story. Chad's awareness regarded the role that love was to play in his life, as important. He was looking for love after his parents divorced and needed to be loved. Within his negative situation, a need arose to change his situation in future; being able to love his children in such a way that he felt he did not receive from his parents ("I had to start now looking for love, I will say. Multiple relationships with girls. And then, if I had this thing that you know, I want to be loved. If I go to a girl and then she does something or just let go ... next one. Because I wanted the love").

Chad realised that he wanted to have a life that was different to his parents (i.e. being divorced) ("Now, the sad part about this ... my marriage ... was that, because of the divorce that I experienced, I didn't want my children to go through what I went through. So, I wanted everything to be perfect in the marriage and that thing cost, almost cost me my marriage"). He also realised he needed professional support to help him handle his situation. Chad took personal responsibility in seeking professional help in order for him to cope with his negative low point experiences ("I was admitted at [*mentions health care facility*] ... and that is where I got the help, that is where everything was revealed to me"). This step contributed significantly to the improvement of his relationships with his spouse and other family members. He was also able to start dealing with negative issues, which he did not realise he still carried with him ("... everything was revealed to me that whatever happened is happening. It's not in my marriage, it is because of what happened with my parents. It was tough to talk about all this, but ... the two weeks that I stayed there, I was helped").

Since Chad had realised and gained insight into himself, he was able to realise things about others and gain insight into those with similar hurts ("I only realised Saturday when she told us that she also went for help. That thing she was also bitter. So the only person who didn't get the chance to deal with the things is the one that's coming after me, we're busy with it").



Chad's positive self-talk was internal and showed that he wanted change regarding his low point experience, and it urged him to push himself forward. Chad had dreams of being loved and giving love. This dream persisted and was realised by getting married, receiving professional help, and dealing with his past. He managed to strengthen his relationship with his wife and family. From a young age, Chad's goal, was to find love and not get divorced like his parents. He pursued this goal and got married. With help, he was able to find happiness in marriage, which he always wanted. He said, "...but there was this thing inside of me that said, 'I want to see myself doing something different from what they did to us'. That is what pushed me. 'I want to have kids one day that I must love, and a wife that I must love' ... what I went through this and I'm not going to repeat that. I don't want it to happen to my kids ... Because at that age. I was ... there was this thing inside of me that said, 'you know what, let me push-push school'".

Chad was often motivated by his father, and within himself, to push himself in order to overcome difficulties, such as studying and finishing school. He wanted things to be different in his own life, therefore he was driven to finish matric, get a job and marry, which he did. Since his school years he was looking for love and to be loved ("I want to be loved. If I go to a girl and then she do something or just let go... next one. Because I wanted the love"). Eventually, after being married, he went for professional help to resolve the issue he has been carrying around with him since his youth. He also went to church for help. He was able to reach his high point and also had to forgive his mother by writing a letter to her in order to find closure.

Chad was also driven by the need to find love and experience being loved, lacked as a result of his parents' divorce. He said, "When I got married, I got married because I wanted to ... like, reverse the situation of my dad and mom". When his parents got divorced, Chad received support from his father. The support from his spouse, children and ultimately the professional help were also important to enable him to move forward from his low point experience. Chad also received support from attending church and his faith in God played a significant role in overcoming his negative low point experience on his way to the positive high point experience. Going to church and being supported by another person with faith in God helped him ("he's a very spiritual man, and that [unclear] there one Sunday, he took me to church and it was as if the pastor was told that I was there. He came from [unclear]... he said, 'you know, people when they have problems, they tend to turn to the problem instead of turning to God; facing God and leave the problem to God'. They faced the problem and I think, that is what I was doing. The thing helped me emotionally and spiritually. I could. So, that's what I'm saying, even this past weekend, I went to church with my

family. You know, I'm... now I had to reassure my wife that I love her. It was my mistake. So, I'm trying the best I can, to get my marriage on track again").

Chad's honesty was related to his willingness to forgive his mother. He was honest about it being difficult to forgive her. He did however write an open and honest letter to her, in a positive attempt from his side to overcome his unforgiveness and also to move towards his high point of improved familial and marital relationships. Chad received professional support that helped him deal with his past-unresolved issues. This opened his eyes towards others, such as his sister who was also struggling with the issue of their parent's divorce. He then wanted to render support to her, as this would improve his life even more, because his family was important to him.

Chad expressed his forgiveness towards his mother in the form of writing a letter informing her about his feelings relating to what she did and presenting it to her in person. It led to the family members being present, crying openly and finding relief as a result. It also made him take a step and act towards improving his marital relationship with his wife ("The letter had ... it was tough... I don't want to lie. I didn't even want to forgive her for what she did to us, but the only way for me to deal with this thing is to forgive her, so that I can have peace ... In the letter, I had to write everything that she did that I felt it was unfair to me ... at the end, but I must forgive her, and ... ja. I did write a letter. And then Saturday was that meeting where I had to tell her straight now that, 'we did one-two-three. You did me wrong by doing one-two-three, as a mother'. But it was tough").

Chad found meaning through a renewed outlook on life and marriage, personal growth, coping with his low point, being loved and supported, and giving advice ("And then Saturday was that meeting ... it was tough. People were crying. All of us ... But it did us a lot of good. Ja ... we have children, in my unit ... the boys that we are supposed to be in school. We don't even call them juveniles, they are children ... you will ask them 'why you are here?'. Some of them come with the uniform of school [*unclear*]. They will tell you stories, and then using my own experience, I will also sometimes help them, that, 'when you get out of it, it's not the end of the world. Go back to school ... do this ... do this ... do this'").

### **6.2.13 Participant 13: Gert**

#### **6.2.13.1 Background information**

The researcher was informed about Gert by a family member as a potential participant for the current study. He contacted Gert and requested him to participate, to which he agreed. Gert is a fairly quiet and calm person, well-organized and very well mannered. Gert made an important

decision in his life: he chose to continue to support his wife in spite of their accident and her disability. He kept on following a career path in teaching and education, and had two highlights in his life so far: The birth of his two children and becoming a school principal. Although, he might feel a bit disappointed and less satisfied than originally expected in terms of career path, he continues to remain positive and show appreciation for what he has received in life.

#### **6.2.13.2 Summary of Gert's story**

Gert is a 59 year old White male who is employed as a high school principal. He had a good life as a child, with no significant bad experiences at school, doing well academically and in sport. He did his National Service in the Defence Force and was able to go to university afterwards, which he completed, after which he was employed as a teacher in the Eastern Cape Province. He enjoyed his studies and was appointed at a very good school. While on a positive high point in life, Gert and his pregnant wife were in a traumatic car accident, which left her paralysed and caused her to lose their unborn child. He still supports his wife, and she stood by him as he managed to continue with his career path. In his career, he has been able to reach the level of school principal. Currently, they are the proud parents of two healthy and successful children, with the future possibility of extending their family through their children's relationships with other families (i.e. one being married and the other engaged) and of having grandchildren in the future.

#### **6.2.13.3 RoL drawing and SBIQ information**

The RoL drawing took  $\pm 20$  minutes to complete. Gert drew the outlines of a road containing a dam and rocks, filled with blocks of words indicating important events, dates and the low and high points. He also drew a summary line graph of significant events, indicating the low point as an abrupt drop in the graph (See Appendix F). The interview session started directly after the RoL drawing and took  $\pm 24$  minutes. Gert did not specifically mention a turning-point, but was probed by the researcher with the aspects of the research question to indicate where things started moving from the low point. Gert then started elaborating on this.

His description of how he understands 'quality of life' is as follows: "Doing and striving what you can do. Career – achieved what I wanted – to largest degree. Not all. Family – healthy 2x children/successful and happy wife. Financially – middle of road. Can buy what we need. Future uncertain in long term. Own health – not much to complain – grateful". Regarding the rating scale questions (See Appendix D) he rated himself as **happy**, **religious**, and **neutral** in terms of the importance of personal status. On the different aspects, he rated himself as follows: **Perseverance: 9; Caring: 7; Giving: 7; Positive attitude: 8; and General quality of life: 7.**

#### 6.2.13.4 Discussion of themes

In Gert's story, the dominant themes in moving from a low point to a high point were acceptance, positive attitude, positive self-thought, choice/decision-making, support from, doing something, support to, and meaning. In Gert's story, the unique themes in support of his main themes were faith/religious belief (God), honesty/openness, and appreciation/thankfulness.

Gert's low point was the accident he and his wife were involved in and which left her paralysed. There were aspects in his life, presented as themes in this study, which enabled him to move beyond this point and towards his high point. Gert accepted that which he could not change and said, "... fine with the low point, because it is something that we made peace with. But if you think back, the very very low part in the low point was the ... the feeling that there's nothing ... I couldn't change positions. I would have changed positions ... That was a low to the extent that I couldn't do anything".

Gert had to make a difficult decision regarding his unborn child's life and the life of his wife. For him it was obvious, although painful. In support of this decision, he committed himself in deciding to support his wife, who became paraplegic. His faith and religious beliefs helped him to accept what happened to his wife, as well as his own life's circumstances, and he was able to make peace with it. In addition, he accepted that he had to deal with the situation and committed himself to taking care of his wife. He further managed to decisively maintain and follow his career path as well. Gert took responsibility for taking caring for his wife, continuing to provide support to her while still pursuing a career. He said, "I had to make a choice to have the baby being removed or the operation to take place on my wife. There was no real choice ... We opted for the wife and then they actually had to remove the baby ... it was just part of the will of God. I fully believe in that ... and I had to tell her that's [unclear] ... And I promised I would give her the best help that she could get and I did. That unselfishness [unclear] ... really sacrificed a lot in time ... And then I had to go back to do some work again and came back to her. But I could support her ... She had ... a hell of a time in hospital. She stayed there for seven months. I was up and down [unclear] ... up and down ... She came back after about a year. We went back to the same town ... I went on with my teaching career... I got promotion after that".

Gert showed positive self-thought regarding his wife's situation. He would not accept negative thoughts overriding the positive ones and found that he was good enough and capable to handle the situation ("That's what they told me. The chances of her living was minute. I must actually face the fact that she might die. And that I did not want to accept ... And then, in the next week ... two

weeks ... it came to life that she did not have any brain damage or any other injuries apart from the spinal cord ... I thought I was 'now, nothing really hold me back', although an accident like that almost puts a little question mark behind your name ... Perhaps, I almost felt 'perhaps, I was good enough'" Gert's positive attitude was visible during and after their traumatic accident. It helped him cope and also came through in his commitment in taking care of his wife, while still working to support her ("I was also injured but nothing special ... in hospital somebody made some mistakes medically, but they were 90% good, 10% not good ... and I always thought that people could see that she was and still is a very special person ... When I left teaching, then the finances didn't work out to the extent that I did something that I did not want to do, so I moved back to the education profession. It took me unfortunately a few years, because I had to take a severance package. It took me a few years, but we are back on track again").

Gert stood out in as far as he took responsibility for his wife immediately after she became disabled, promised to provide the best support to her and dedicated himself to taking care of her. He made unselfish sacrifices, but kept on working and following a career path to ensure that he could take care of her. They have a strong relationship and he has been able to deal with his low point. He loved her very much; she gave his life meaning and the blessing of having two lovely children. He said, "But the low was that actually, that ... that I'm sitting here with my loving wife. And losing the baby was actually a very small factor, but a factor. But losing my wife was a big factor, and it never happened ... And I promised I would give her the best help that she could get and I did ... five or six years after that happened, the people said we could try to have a baby. We were successful. The baby was born. Four years later, the second child was born, naturally born. Totally, totally wonderful special children and a special occasion in my life".

Gert's support to deal with his wife's disability came from professionals, his wife herself, as well as others within the community ("I must be honest that the medical profession ... those years ... They stabilised her ... they had to do some operations. They stabilised her ... And then they had to transport her within a few days ... I never realised how efficient those people were ... And she got medical treatment in [*mentions hospital's name*] hospital ... in the spinal cord unit. And they were exceptional there ... and the specialists there, was exceptional ... We went back to the same town ... the people were 'especially supportive ... And the school accommodated me quite well ... My wife was open ... she never, never reacted").

Gert also mentioned the importance that God played in his life, in saying that what happened with his wife's disability was the will of God. He said, "So, the very low point in my life was an accident that could not be prevented or could not be foretold ... it was just part of the will of God. I fully

believe in that, why ... I still don't know". He coped with his emotions by accepting his wife's situation and decided to commit to and support her. His wife's support to him through her own acceptance of her situation also helped him cope, as well as people in the community's support.

Furthermore, through faith in God, he could accept what happened and he made peace with it. In the end he had a positive, honest, open and meaningful relationship with his wife ("My wife was open ... she never, never reacted ... She is the most beautiful special person that I can think of and ... my wife is wheelchair bound now to that [age] ... It's now almost thirty years ... And I think that is probably why we are still happy together. With all our little fights [unclear], is that I think we trust each other when it comes to being honest and straightforward ... And very honest now, I think she's dealing with it better even than what I am dealing with it. And that to me is the big saving grace in the relationship". Gert was thankful for what happened in his life, and had less regret as a result thereof ("So, up to now ... I am thankful ... much more thankful, than regretful, at what had happened in my life").

Through Gert's experiences, he found meaning. He said, "That is all part of the game that life plays with us ... So, the very low point in my life was an accident that could not be prevented or could not be foretold ... it was just part of the will of God ... I'm a happy man. Not because of the accident. I'm a happy man because of what life ... the cards life dealt me. And there is nothing that I could have done anything different... apart from making a few career choices being different, but run of my life ... it's the run of my life. And I'm very content with what it is. That's it".

#### **6.2.14 Participant 14: Jack Lime**

##### **6.2.14.1 Background information**

Jack Lime was also identified and recruited through the gatekeeper organisation responsible for identifying upcoming athletes with the potential of becoming elite athletes. Jack Lime was very relaxed and presented himself as an open-minded and confident person who was not at all nervous. He spoke as a person who knew what he wanted to say. The interview was short, as the researcher was of the opinion that the participant had finished talking, and had provided sufficient detail regarding the answer to the research question and his experience. The participant spoke openly and freely in a spontaneous to-the-point manner.

##### **6.2.14.2 Summary of Jack Lime's story**

Jack Lime is an 18 year old Coloured male who is unemployed. His story started on a high, as he was very excited to have been invited to participate in soccer trials in France as part of a national

second division soccer team. He regarded this as the big opportunity in his life, where he could excel in his sport. During his visit there, he sustained an injury, which was severe enough to expedite his to return to South Africa. This was a significant low point for him. He was devastated to have missed the opportunity to participate in the trials. He was disappointed and felt that he was useless, weak and a failure. He managed to deal with these emotions and the low point mainly through his faith and a positive attitude. He has been invited to participate in trials at the first division level in the Western Cape Province. Jack Lime regards himself as currently being on a high point of his life and he aspires to continue to go even higher.

#### **6.2.14.3 RoL drawing and SBIQ information**

The RoL drawing took  $\pm 10$  minutes to complete. Jack Lime did not draw a river; instead, he drew three blocks of phrases/words indicating his low and high points, connected with arrows in-between. The middle block of words indicated a dip in the sequence of phrases/words describing his feelings when he was down (See Appendix F). The interview session started directly after the RoL drawing and took  $\pm 19$  minutes. Jack Lime did not specifically mention a turning-point, but presented enough information in this respect and therefore was not probed by the researcher.

His description of how he understands ‘quality of life’ is as follows: “QOL to me is how you value life. How and what you value as most important and the things which aren’t. To a degree, it also links to standard of living as well. Personally, I feel that the quality of life is seen differently by many people and many times it’s under-valued, which leads to lots of people’s negative outlooks on life”. In terms of the rating scale questions (See Appendix D) he rated himself as **happy**, **religious**, and **neutral** in terms of the importance of personal status. On the different aspects, he rated himself as indicated: **Perseverance: 9; Caring: 8; Giving: 7; Positive attitude: 8; and General quality of life: 7.**

#### **6.2.14.4 Discussion of themes**

In Jack Lime’s story, the dominant themes to move from a low point to a high point were faith/religious belief (God), acceptance, realisation, positive attitude/thoughts, self-thought, doing something, and meaning. In Jack Lime’s story, the sub-themes in support of his main themes were goal-orientated/driven and support from.

Jack Lime’s low point was being disappointed for not being able to finish trails overseas and receive an opportunity to be selected for a second division team due to injury. Certain aspects were present in his life (presented as themes in the study) for him to move beyond this low point in his

life. Jack Lime's realisation was in terms of what he had to do to overcome negatives surrounding his low point as well as realising spiritually why he had such a negative experience. He said, "What the whole thing taught me is, that if it's not God's time, then we can't exactly force things. So, I think the whole situation ... it just increased my faith ... So, from that whole thing that happened in France, I realised that I have to use everything that I've learned there and put that into this Vasco da Gama trial. And just thinking back as to how everything worked out I realised ... from that low point, which was once a high, I overcame a lot of things and then I managed to get to a new high; which I'm hoping to continue [*unclear*]".

Jack Lime's realisation was further in regards to his faith and belief in God as well as that which he has learned in his life to apply in moving ahead. Jack Lime also found acceptance through his faith in God and found peace through it. To Jack Lime faith and religion played a very prominent role. His setback was also managed through his belief in God, accepting it as God's time and plan for his life. He has grown spiritually with regards to his faith in God and found peace through it. He said "If it's not God's time, then we can't exactly force things. So, I think the whole situation ... it just increased my faith. I found myself more of the time having conversations with God than with anybody else and I think it was His peace really, that just came over my life, that just allowed me to accept what had happened and realise that if it wasn't that moment now, it will happen again ... then I just continued playing [*mentions his sport*] knowing that, when it was God's time, He would bring the right opportunity with the right people involved and everything ... And just thinking back as to how everything worked out I realised that God's plan was bigger for me".

Jack Lime's thinking was positive in eliminating or overriding negative thoughts. Through focusing, persistence, faith and belief in God, he was able to grow in himself and think positively about his situation and life. He could apply something positively learned to a future trial. He used positive self-thought to turn negativities into something positive. His description of his turning-point experience is characterised by him having a positive attitude in managing his negative emotions and in positively looking forward to enjoy and value life more. He is positive about himself, motivated and energised. He said, "...allowed me to accept what had happened and realise that if it wasn't that moment now, it will happen again. And ja, I just from there ... I just flipped all the negative emotions and all the bad thoughts. I flipped them into positive ones. Released all that negative vibes and I just ... refocused on what was important at the time, which was my finals. Managed to get through "

He continued participating in sport, working hard and started believing in the future possibility of being given another opportunity again. He was being very positive and was given another



opportunity (“Working hard, putting in my own time, my effort, making lots of sacrifices, this big opportunity has come. And it looks a strong possibility that I will sign there and be playing professionally and earning some money for myself, being able to contribute to my household as well”).

Jack Lime had support from his family as well as within his faith in God to be able to deal with the setback he experienced (“I found myself more of the time having conversations with God than with anybody else ... So, it allowed me to come home ... allowed me to finish that ... allowed me to get the support from my family that I needed”). Jack Lime continued playing sport and what he loved doing. He worked hard, putting in a lot of effort and sacrifices. Through his faith in God, he was positive about the future (“Managed to get through that and then I just continued playing [*mentions his sport*], when it was God’s time, He would bring the right opportunity with the right people involved and everything”). He was goal-orientated; he would learn from his previous low point experience and decided to work hard and focus again on the future to be selected for the team once again. Jack Lime’s drive was based on overturning the negative low point experience of not finishing his sport trials, by re-focussing again on achieving his goals of playing professionally, earning income and provide for his family. In order to accomplish that, he would work hard, put in time and effort, make sacrifices and wait for the opportunity to come. He said, “So, from that whole thing that happened in France, I realised that I have to use everything that I’ve learned there and put that into this Vasco da Gama trial ... And just ... focus again and push more for what I wanted”.

Flowing from his religious convictions, Jack Lime also experienced self-transcendence and flow. He was able to be very positive about re-experiencing a new high after his previous low point experience and grow personally and holistically. He said, “So, I think God’s bigger picture came into forehand ... it just showed me that no matter how much you want to force something if it’s not God’s time, then it’s not going to be useful either. So ... from that low point, which was once a high, I overcame a lot of things and then I managed to get to a new high. Which I’m hoping to continue ... I think for me from where I was to where I am now, not only in terms of [*mentions his sport*], but like holistically as a person from what I’ve overcome and how I’ve matured from that situation, I think it’s a high on that aspect, yes ... I’m currently in that high, it hasn’t been finalised. So, to say so, I’m basically just riding along with the tide ... I’m currently in the moment”.

Jack Lime also found the positive in the negative and value within life (“Like, you have those negative emotions when you have the low and then with the high you ... it’s just like you have extra energy ... you have some motivation for every day. And I think ... that’s something ... that if you have that and you’re riding on that, it makes life better. It makes your interactions with people much

... much better ... it just makes you ... enjoy life and value life more. So, I think at the moment, if I could speak more on the high, I would. But I'm currently in the moment").

### **6.2.15 Participant 15: Guy**

#### **6.2.15.1 Background information**

Guy was also identified and recruited through the gatekeeper organisation responsible for identifying upcoming athletes that has the potential of becoming elite athletes. Guy is residing with his mother, who received the current researcher with openness and in a very friendly and hospitable manner. Guy presented himself in confidence and in openness towards the researcher. He was very friendly and well mannered. He was impaired in drawing and writing. The researcher completed the open question on QOL (contained in the SBIQ) on his behalf. Guy's mother also presented the researcher with a portfolio document regarding him.

#### **6.2.15.2 Summary of Guy's story**

Guy is a young (23 years old at the time of the interview) White male who is a floor assistant at a gym. He has had cerebral palsy since the age of five months due to a serious car accident in which he sustained brain damage and lost his father. He indicated this to have been his low points. He was in a special needs school, and received specialised education for learning problems experienced. He started participating in sport since he was eleven-twelve years old and since then achieved provincial as well as national colours, set several records and won numerous medals. In 2012, he was part of the preliminary team for the Paralympics, but then missed out going (by one place not being selected for the team), which is seen as a further low point. Guy is persistent in his sport, aims to participate during the Rio Paralympics in 2016 and aspires to become the best in the world in his sport. In spite of his disability, Guy has successfully adapted to the outside world, and has proven that he is competitive and capable of achieving much in life.

#### **6.2.15.3 RoL drawing and SBIQ information**

The RoL drawing took  $\pm 20$  minutes to complete. Guy did not draw a river, instead he drew circles with groups of words in sequence and connected by arrows indicating his low and high points and some important events in-between (See Appendix F). The interview session started directly after the RoL drawing and took  $\pm 12$  minutes. Guy did not specifically mention a turning-point, and was not probed by the researcher to indicate where the change started. He provided an answer without probing.

His description of how he understands ‘quality of life’ is as follows: “Om suksesvol te wees in wat jy doen – net om genoeg *resources* te hê; net om ‘n goeie lewe te hê, soos genoeg geld en *sponsors* om jou uitgawes te dek. Om ‘n goeie werk te hê, wat jy geniet” [ROFT: “*To be successful in what one does – just to have enough resources; just to have a good life, such as enough money and sponsors to cover your expenses. To have a good job that you enjoy*”]. In terms of the rating scale questions (See Appendix D) he rated himself as **happy**, **religious**, and **neutral** in terms of the importance of personal status. On the different aspects, he rated himself as indicated: **Perseverance: 9; Caring: 8; Giving: 8; Positive attitude: 10; and General quality of life: 10.**

#### 6.2.15.4 Discussion of themes

In Guy’s story, the dominant themes in moving from a low point to a high point were acceptance, positive attitude (strong mind set), decision-making, goal-setting/orientated, passion, support from, doing something, and meaning. In Guy’s story, the sub-themes in support of his main themes were focus and faith/religious belief (prayer).

Guy’s low point started when he became disabled in a car accident in which his father died. He did not indicate on his father’s passing as a low in his life. Rather, his disability, and with that not being selected for the national team, was seen as his low point. There were certain aspects, presented as themes in this study that were important to enable him to move beyond his low and towards his high point. Guy spontaneously indicated his acceptance of his own circumstances. In acceptance, he was able to move forward. He said, “Ja, ek het altyd gesien ek is bietjie ... nie anders as die ander nie, maar soos party goed ... soos met die sports in ... maar dit het my nie eintlik gepla nie. Ek het maar net saam met my vriende aange[gaan] ... Ja, ag mense het my gespot met goed op skool, maar, ag ... Dit het my eintlik nie gepla nie ... Maar, ek het maar voortgekom en net weer hard geoefen ... Om weer bo uit te kom en hopelik nou weer die span te maak vir volgende jaar en dan hopelik hierdie keer te gaan ... ek het maar net my soos ... sê maar, vertrou daarin gesit en maar sterk gebly en ... Ek het maar net aangegaan ... ek het maar agter my gesit. Jy moet maar aangaan, want anderste gaan jy net dalk die volgende een mis”. [ROFT: “*I always saw that I was different from others ... like in sports, but it did not bother me. I just carried on with my friends ... yes, people teased me at school, but it did not actually bother me. I just continued to move forward and practised hard, to get to the top and hopefully be selected for the team again next year. I’ve placed my trust in that and remained strong ... I just carried on ... I’ve placed it behind me. You have to; otherwise you may miss out on it next time*”].

Guy stated that he had a strong mind-set and that he applied this in facing challenges. Through positive self-thought, he had a positive outlook on life. He said, “Ek was maar *strung on my mind* ... ek het maar net my ... vertroue daarin gesit en maar sterk gebly en ... [*strung on my mind*] ... My sterkste punt is, ek dink sal wees ... as ek iets wil doen soos, my *mind* daarn'toe *set* [*unclear*], sal ek dit ten volle doen. Soos my fietsry ... ek's *dedicated*”. [ROFT: “*I was strung on my mind ... I've placed my trust in that and remained strong ... strung on my mind ... My strength is ... setting my mind on something, then I'll do it full-out. Like, with cycling I'm dedicated*”].

Guy had a positive attitude, which is regarded by him as a strong mind-set, from early on in life. His mother raised him to be positive. He applied this attitude to handling negative situations and setbacks, coping with teasing, and facing challenges. He was not really bothered by negatives and remained positive and goal-driven (“Want my ma ... sy't my baie positief grootgemaak en goed ... Ja, ag mense het my gespot met goed op skool, maar, ag ... Dit het my eintlik nie gepla nie ... Ek het maar net aangegaan ... ek het maar agter my gesit ... Soos my fietsry ... ek's *dedicated* So, ek is baie ... doelgerig”). [ROFT: “*My mother raised me to be very positive ... yes, people teased me at school, but it did not actually bother me ... I just carried on ... I've placed it behind me ... Like with cycling I am dedicated ... I'm very goal-driven*”].

Guy indicated his passion for sport by referring to cycling as his life; he eats, sleeps and ... [practises] it. He enjoys exercising and being on the road. He always liked sport and has a passion for it. He said, “Ja. Fietsry is my lewe, ek sal fietsry eet, slaap en *whatever* ... soos hulle daai goed sê. Ek kyk fietsry, ry hard fiets as ek oefen. Ek *like* dit op die pad om te ry ... om te kompeteer oorsee teen die ander lande ... Ja nee ... ek het maar altyd gehou van sport. [ROFT: “*Cycling is my life ... I will eat cycling ... sleep cycling ... and ... I watch cycling ... I cycle intensely when I practice ... I love to be on the road and compete overseas ... yes, I always loved sport*”]. Guy accepted negative aspects surrounding his low point by having a positive attitude and a strong mind. He also kept moving forward, through persisting in participation in sport, and being goal-orientated. He found meaning through sport (“... ‘*hard work and dedication*’ ... dis ... wat ek ook op oefen ... en volgens leef. As jy hard werk en *dedicate* is, sal jy bereik wat jy wil bereik, in jou sport of lewe of *whatever* ... ek's *dedicated*. Ek sal nie gaan kuier by my vriende nie. Ek sal vroeër [*unclear*] al die goed reg doen om my *goal* te bereik wat ek ... Want dis op die einde beter om dit te bereik, as om met jou vriende te kuier [*unclear*] ... sê maar die volgende jaar, *Olympics* mis. So, ek is baie doelgewig wat ek doen, doelgerig”). [ROFT: “... ‘*hard work and dedication*’ ... *that's what I do and live by. If you work hard you will achieve what you want in sport and in life ... I am dedicated ... I will not go out with friends, I would rather do everything right earlier to achieve my goal. At the*”].

*end of the day, it is better to achieve this than go out with friends ... for instance, miss out on the Olympics. So ... I'm very goal-driven"]*.

Guy set himself a goal: to be selected for the national team for the next Paralympics. His life's achievements and outlook indicated how he is driven to perform and attain his goals ("En ek gaan nou ... 1<sup>st</sup> of June, gaan ek vir my [*unclear*] oorsee vir Springbok-kleure, ag ... Springbok en hopelik volgende jaar, 2016, gaan ek kwalifiseer vir Rio 'Paralympics'. Dis my hoogtepunt, ja, om Springbok-kleure te bereik ... Ek het so al vier jaar hard geoefen"). [ROFT: "*I'm going ... June 1<sup>st</sup> ... overseas ... next year, I'm hopefully going to qualify for the Rio Paralympics ... for four years I have practiced extremely hard*"]. Guy had the support of his mother from an early age when he lost his father and became disabled. He also received support within the community, via special schooling education and friends ("Soos van jongs af ... ek was in 'n spesiale skool ... na spesiale skool toe wat my met leerprobleme gehelp het ... na [*mentions school's name*] toe ... wat hulle my gehelp het om die werk te doen ... En ek het maar altyd so bietjie gesukkel met gewone sport en daai ... En toe sit hulle my op 'n ... soos 'n driewiel fiets, in graad 3 ... Toe begin ek fiets te ry en daai jaar het ek [*provincial*]-kleure gekry"). [ROFT: "*From a young age, I was in a special needs school ... (mentions school's name) ... they helped me with my learning problems and to do my work. I always struggled a bit with regular sport ... they put me on a type of tricycle in grade 3, and I started cycling. That year I received provincial colours*"].

Guy was able to handle the setback of not being selected for the national team ("Jis, ek was soos, nie gebreek gewees nie ... Ek was maar 'strung on my mind', maar [*unclear*] ... bietjie erg vir my. Ek het so al vier jaar hard geoefen, en nou moet een plek ... half die span te mis ... Maar, ek het maar voortgekom en net weer hard geoefen vir die volgende kompetisies. Om weer bo uit te kom en hopelik nou weer die span te maak vir volgende jaar en dan hopelik hierdie keer te gaan"). [ROFT: "*I was not broken ... I was strung on my mind ... a bit disappointing ... for four years I have practiced intensely, and missed it by one place ... But I carried on and practiced hard again for the next competition ... to get to the top again, hopefully to make the team for next year and then to go*"].

Guy's faith supported and enabled him to move away from his low point. Guy declared that he was a devoted believer who often prays. His mother also often prayed for him during his upbringing ("Ek is ook 'n groot gelowige. So, ek het maar net my soos ... sê maar, vertrou daarin gesit en maar sterk gebly ... my ma het vir my baie gebed van jongs af ... ja baie gebed en ... ja, ek bid maar baie en lewe maar reg om dit te bereik"). [ROFT: "*Yes, I am a fervent/devoted believer. So I just*

*put my trust in it and remained strong ... My mother prayed for me many times when I was growing up ... yes, I also pray often and live right to achieve that”].*

Guy also had to make a decision at an earlier age regarding the sport he wanted to participate in. Although he enjoyed cycling, athletics and swimming, he opted for cycling and in the end, it turned out to have been the correct and best decision he made. It made him focus on one sport in which he excelled and received high-level recognition. Even though it was difficult, Guy started participating in sport during his school years; first in rugby, but later on he discovered that he was good at cycling. He then focussed on the one sport, although he had performed well in athletics, running, cycling and swimming. He pursued cycling as a sport and through persistence, hard work in training, dedication, setting goals and a positive attitude, along with a strong mind-set, he was able to handle difficulties and setbacks on the way. His sport achievements along the way also kept him going. He said, “Toe ek by [mentions school’s name] begin het ... fiets te ry ... sport [unclear – en daar] ... ek het maar altyd gehou van sport ... Toe begin ek fiets te ry en daai jaar het ek [provincial colours]-kleure gekry in fietsry, hardloop en atletiek. En ja, toe het ek deelgeneem, ‘n paar SA’s gedoen en medaljes gewen vir atletiek, fietsry en swem ... Toe moet ek kies tussen watter sport ek wil ... soos spesialiseer, dan kan ek nie al drie goed doen nie, of nie goed doen nie, maar ek moet een gekies het daar wat ek op *focus* en toe kies ek fietsry. En 2010, toe het ek my eerste [national colours]-kleure gekry”. [ROFT: “*I started at (mentions school’s name) with cycling ... I always loved sport ... I obtained provincial colours in cycling and athletics ... participated in SA competitions and obtained medals in athletics, cycling and swimming. I had to choose one to focus on, and I chose cycling. In 2010, I, for the first time, obtained national colours”].*

#### **6.2.16 Participant 16: Tasha**

##### **6.2.16.1 Background information**

Tasha was also identified and recruited through the gatekeeper organisation responsible for identifying, amongst other criteria, young financially disadvantaged upcoming athletes that has the potential of becoming elite athletes. Tasha was open, friendly and eager to start with her RoL drawing. She was confident and self-assured. She seemed to be a very dedicated sportsperson, training hard and aspiring to achieve even higher goals in life.

### 6.2.16.2 Summary of Tasha's story

Tasha is an 18 year old Coloured female who is still in school. Her low points stemmed from a humble background: her parents were experiencing financial difficulties and they were struggling to feed their five children. Furthermore, she was good at her sport, but there weren't sufficient finances to pay for special diets, classes and training to excel in her sport. Struggles to secure sponsors and domestic fights about not having enough money were part of her background environment. On a personal level, Tasha was also experiencing feelings of low self-esteem and low motivation, because she was unable to function at her full potential. Still she persisted and she was able to overcome her low points. Her mother strongly supported her and she was started winning competitions. In becoming a national athlete, she was able to obtain even more opportunities to excel. She found a sponsorship, their family conditions improved and she feels she is currently performing at an even higher level of potential. Tasha is still young, but she is already coaching other athletes. She is a national representative who aspires to reach even higher goals, such as practising her sport as a professional and also in achieving a higher educational qualification.

### 6.2.16.3 RoL drawing and SBIQ information

The RoL drawing took  $\pm 10$  minutes to complete. Tasha drew a river, flowing upwards from the bottom left to the top right, along with hills and mountains and word-columns indicating her low and high points (See Appendix F). The interview session started directly after the RoL drawing and took  $\pm 15$  minutes. The researcher explained the meaning of 'significant' as being 'important'. Tasha did not specifically mention a turning-point, but was probed by the researcher with the aspects of the research question to indicate where she started moving away from the low point, to which she responded with her story.

Her description of how she understands 'quality of life' is as follows: "Quality of life to me is living life to the fullest, doing everything to the best of your ability. Making sure that as every day passes your morals and values is everything you have been putting forward; accepting what you can't change but also never giving up and reaching everything you put your mind to. In terms of the rating scale questions (See Appendix D) she rated herself as **happy**, **religious**, and the importance of personal status as **very important**. On the different aspects, she rated herself as follows: **Perseverance: 8; Caring: 9; Giving: 6; Positive attitude: 10; and General quality of life: 8.**

#### 6.2.16.4 Discussion of themes

In Tasha's story, the dominant themes in moving from a low point to a high point were positive self-thought (insight), support from, goal-orientated and focus, passion, future dream/aspiration, doing something, and meaning. In Tasha's story, the sub-theme in support of her main themes was support to.

Tasha's low point was personal and financial difficulties and poor living conditions. She employed certain aspects, which are presented as themes in this study, in order to move away from the low point towards her high point. Tasha applied introspection to gain personal insight and develop confidence. Tasha's positive self-thought involved believing in herself, being confident and obtaining sponsors, being positive about the future and being able to put in an effort to achieve something ("... and I believe in myself. I think for me ... I started believing in myself, confidence came and from there, from not being able to go to any competitions, I was allowed to go to some of the top events, which were world championships, becoming a 4-time world champion, right now ... And for me, coming from that low point in my high point, I think, people started noticing that I was starting to win national levels").

Tasha also indicated that she had a passion for what she does and her sport, which was evident in the effort she put into training. She was strongly driven by her goals. Hard work, effort, hours of training, sacrifices, eating right and not buying clothes and shoes or partying, were the things she did to accomplish her goal. She said, "I do, ja. Definitely [*love her sport*] ... Yes. I do, do it every day ... I trained every day for about 4 hours a day, for 3 hours a day. Sometimes coming home at about 11 o'clock in the night and still having to do homework. And then, waking up for school the next morning". She kept focusing on her goal, trained hard and put everything into her sport to achieve the high point, always prioritising it. Tasha also had strong future dreams and aspirations. She wanted to further her education, help her family, train hard and be the best by obtaining achievements in her sport; she also aspires to go overseas one day to coach others.

Tasha managed to overcome negative emotions by not focusing on negative thoughts and feelings, such as worries ("I was told to not focus on any financial things. I mustn't worry about how to get there. All I must worry about is, improving my training and making sure that I stay the number one fighter. Whatever I do, staying on top"). Regarding suicidal thoughts she had, she realised she did not want it, she wanted to move forward ("You see at the time, when things were going so wrong, I always thought about suicide ... Just, I can't anymore [*unclear*] ... but then I realised: it's not the way. It's not ... something, because then I take my life and then I [*unclear – leave*] my parents ...



when you're gone, they will still cry for you and stuff, so, I just realised that's what I want. But I was ready to do that, but then I just knew, this isn't right I shouldn't do this. But then after that I didn't think about that anymore. I should just move forward, ja, because that's what I thought, it's the best way ... I was alone at home that day, there was no one around. I had pills and stuff in my hand and just thought this is it, but then I just realised this is my life. I can't take it, that's not the right thing to do").

When she had suicidal thoughts, she took personal responsibility for her own life, in realising that it would not be proper to go that extreme and hurt others. Tasha's taking personal responsibility for her poor circumstances involved doing something to focus on her sport, training hard and not focusing on the negatives. ("You need money ... But, you can't put yourself into debt, ja, with trying to get them there. So, for me it was quite difficult ... for me, I have to train by myself ... I knew I couldn't expect my parents to pay that, because they have to think about my siblings. Cause, they also need to get the same opportunity as I got. So, I couldn't just get all the attention and stuff for me ... But I had to put in all the work and sacrifice going out with friends, making sure that my body's in shape, I'm kind of eating the right food and that my training is on point"). Tasha took responsibility for her own development as a sportsperson. She kept working hard and being consistent in her training in order to move towards her high point. She put in a lot of effort and stayed focused and goal-driven ("And the competitions I did go to, I did really well in, and that's where I got a couple of sponsors ... I think, having my national colours, being in the ... team for [*mentions her sport*], I think that definitely opened the door for bursaries and stuff ... so, that I will be able to have a career after sport").

Tasha also had the necessary support from her parents, especially her mother, in obtaining further support from a sponsor to assist her in achieving in sport, which became a high point away from her poor background circumstances. Other sponsors and her coach also provided support. She said, "But something that was good, is my parents are always telling me to keep working hard; keep going ... my mother is a person that supports me through everything and she will do anything to get me where I want to be in life ... my mother helped. For me all I ... all along ... Like, from my coach ... from my parents, all I was told to not focus on any financial things. I mustn't worry about how to get there. All I must worry about is, improving my training and making sure that I stay the number one fighter. Whatever I do, staying on top".

Tasha showed insight ("...obviously, as parents you do not deny your child that opportunity") and had positive advice for others ("I say, 'keep really focussed, keep your ... keep driven on the goal that you want to achieve in life)"). Tasha's advice to others, gained from wisdom through

introspection, was: “And to me, like, I think, this would be a much different kind of thing to what people normally do. But I know in the day and age that we live in, it’s all about what you want to wear, shoes and partying, right now. For me, I think, take this time now at a young age where your body is still able to do things, to put the most in everything ... whether it’s academics, sport ... anything that you want to achieve in life. Put the effort in now and then enjoy the benefits later instead of having to work hard then and suffering. So, I’d say, ‘work hard now’”. Tasha found meaning in being of value in her family and within society. She has also been able to grow in confidence; thinking positively about herself. She said, “And then, through that, I was given opportunities to start like, my own teaching ... all my siblings ... I’m teaching them ... It helped to get all of them in training, also giving them the same opportunity that I was given ... years down the line ... I will be able to ... try to send my knowledge down to the younger generation”.

In order for Tasha to move closer to her high point, she gave support to others, such as her siblings, and she aspires to teach and train other fellow athletes in future (“And then, through that, I was given opportunities to start like, my own teaching of [*mentions her sport*]. And with me, teaching [*mentions her sport*] now, I’ve pulled all my siblings in and I’m teaching them all. They pay much less. I get the half price, because the fact that I’m teaching them. So, that, not only has it helped me, but it’s helped my family as well ... And then taking that high point in my life to six, seven years down the line, where I will be like 28, 29, I will be able to ... the opportunities that I’ve been given ... try to send my knowledge down to the younger generation. And try to help them come up through the same way I’ve been coming up ... coming from that low point in my high point”).

### **6.2.17 Participant 17: Antie Boy**

#### **6.2.17.1 Background information**

Antie Boy was recruited through the gatekeeper organisation responsible for identifying, amongst other criteria, young financially disadvantaged upcoming athletes that has the potential of becoming elite athletes. He came over as being a quiet type of person. He presented himself in a very decent way by being polite, respectful and well mannered. He took a bit longer than most of the participants to draw his RoL picture, but it provided detailed information. He presented a colourful RoL picture. In general, he talked slowly during the interview.

#### **6.2.17.2 Summary of Antie Boy’s story**

Antie Boy is a 20 year old African male who did not indicate a current job and presumably is unemployed. A low point for him was when father his died when he was eight years old. He also

sustained burns to his face and body during an accident shortly thereafter. A further low was when, at the age of sixteen, he discovered that the woman who raised him was not his biological mother. He had to deal with the questions of why his biological mother left and where she was. He searched and longed to have a relationship with her. He managed to build a relationship with his other siblings and appreciated his stepmother who took care of him. Another low for him was that he lost his best friend in a car accident less than two years before, which affected his studies. He has managed to overcome his challenges and setbacks through a positive attitude life style and valuing the support from those that love him. A high point in his life was being selected for a provincial team in his sport.

#### **6.2.17.3 RoL drawing and SBIQ information**

The RoL drawing took  $\pm 35$  minutes to complete. Antie Boy drew a river with a rock inside and a tree on the side. All around his river were blocks of phrases/sentences describing important experiences, aspirations, lows and highs (See Appendix F). The interview session started directly after the RoL drawing and took  $\pm 22$  minutes. Antie Boy did not specifically mention a turning-point, but was probed by the researcher with the aspects of the research question to indicate where he started moving away from the low point, to which he then started responding.

His description of how he understands ‘quality of life’ is as follows: “To me life is the[y] way we live and the way we do things and how strong we[e] are to get where we wanna be in life. Life is a time, years that you are given to live to make some change, make better living for yourself and others. It’s also what you introduce to this world we live in”. In terms of the rating scale questions (See Appendix D) he rated himself as **happy**, **neutral (religious/not religious)**, and the importance of personal status, as **very important**. On the different aspects, he rated himself as follows: **Perseverance: 7; Caring: 10; Giving: 7; Positive attitude: 10; and General quality of life: 8.**

#### **6.2.17.4 Discussion of themes**

In Antie Boy’s story, the dominant themes in moving from a low point to a high point were awareness, positive self-talk, positive self-thought (attitude), goal-orientated/dreams, support from, doing something, and meaning. In Antie Boy’s story the sub-themes in support of his main themes were forgiveness and support to.

Anti Boy’s low points included losing his father, being burnt in an accident and finding out he was not raised by his biological mother. Certain aspects, presented as themes in this study, was evident in his life and these helped him to move away from the lows towards a high point. Antie Boy

needed to know who he truly was once he found out he was not raised by his biological mother. This came as a shock to him and it he wanted to know who she was. On a deeper intra-personal level, it created a need to find his true identity as a person. In determining his own identity, his background was important to him, but becoming aware of the history between his biological mother and father, namely that they separated and that his father re-married, pulled the carpet from under his feet. Antie Boy was raised by his stepmother all along, whom he loved and who loved him. An identity crisis was inevitable - he searched for his mother and although he was not able to re-establish an effective personal relationship with her, he established loving relationships with his other siblings and found renewed love for his stepmother. He once again appreciated what he had and through this he found comfort in a part of who he was, i.e. somebody who loves others and is loved by others in spite of the past.

The questions and issues surrounding his parents, started his journey towards discovering who his biological mother was, as well as towards discovering who he was himself (i.e. self-discovery) ("My mother told me that she is not my biological mother, and for me to find out that, it wasn't easy. That ... I've been not raised by my biological mother ... from there started questioning, 'where is my mother?' And I found out that my mother was still alive and for me it challenged me a lot ... had many questions to myself. And now, 'why maybe I was rejected by my mother?' ... as I was growing up, I didn't find any difficulties ... being treated unfairly ... I was treated very good ... raised very good. And for me, I thought that was my mother ... and that was the way that it was ... For me, I was her son and she was my mother too, now ... she was a strong woman").

Antie Boy became aware of his vulnerabilities ("But there was still that insecurity inside of me, because of my disability ... so, that made me like distancing myself from other people and uncomfortable with people at first. Also, being the teenage years, I was also becoming more aware of myself and stuff. So, at first ... when I met people, I was like ... not the same ... in the very sense ... but I was like taken back, because I was scared of people would see that I'm disabled and they would judge me because of my disability"). He was therefore aware of the need to fully discover himself and realised that he still had some way to go, but he remained positive about the situation ("But, I'm still working on it, you know, I still want to find myself. I still ... looking for myself and there's a lot I want to achieve in life, as I said. If you stay strong and positive at whatever you do, there is someone watching. There is someone who's loving").

Antie Boy presented positive self-thought in terms of self-confidence, positively evaluating himself, as well as looking forward to the future. Through positive self-thought he eliminated negative thoughts, was open to see how he had changed and developed a positive attitude ("I saw myself as

somebody ... who can change ... for myself ... I'm back and I'm still good at playing sport ... I found that possibilities [*unclear*] ... sport are ... much more. If we stay ... positive and looking forward and from there ... I trained there, to make me to have certain goals to achieve ... And there I was from nowhere ... to somewhere ... my life is in order now, I think. I'm in control of my life"). Antie Boy was positively talking to himself regarding who he was and what he could do, his aspiration and the people who loved him. He said, "For me it was like, 'no, I'm different, I'm not that person that I was before ... there's a lot I want to achieve in life ... if you stay strong and positive at whatever you do, there is someone watching. There is someone who's loving what you're doing who is willing to help and maybe assist you'" Antie Boy came from a positive upbringing and background where his stepmother was very supportive. He held a positive attitude towards others, himself and his sport to help him overcome his negative experiences. He said, "And I lived with my stepmother, who was married ... to my father ... And as ... I was growing up, I didn't found any difficulties".

Antie Boy had dreams of playing for the provincial team. He has reached his goals in the past, in spite of setbacks and continued with his dreams for the future. He has been granted the opportunity to play for the provincial team and remains dedicated to achieve further what he has set out before him ("... at [*mentions local sports training facility*] and from there I got in. And it's where I found that possibilities [*unclear*] ... sport are ... much more. If we stay ... positive and looking forward and from there now, I trained there, to make me to have certain goals to achieve"). Some of his life's dreams or goals were also to love his family, to be loved and to know himself, and to help his mother.

When he had to deal with his uncertainties about who his real mother and he himself was and his sport career, Antie Boy received support from his stepmother, other family members, friends, and a professional counsellor. He said, "I thought that was my mother ... and that was the way that it was ... For me, I was her son and she was my mother too ... I see she was a strong woman ... I was growing up playing [*mentions his sport*] and having positive people around me ... but I also hang out with my friends, who also played". Antie Boy had a best friend who also provided support in the form of counselling ("Finally, I had a friend, also a best friend of mine ... We had a lot in common ... we also being raised by single mothers. So, to me ... he's is like a brother to me ... And we share everything [*accentuates*] ... Everything. So, I share something ... with him, and he quickly comes with a way to help me out, because he was on these ... counselling groups").

Antie Boy participated in his sport from a young age. It helped him to deal with his setbacks and loss of his father. He continued with his sport after he found out that his stepmother has raised him.

His achievements in his sport moved him closer towards his high point. He used the opportunity to be seen and selected for the provincial team. He received counselling from a friend and worked on his anger. In searching for his biological mother, he found more relatives with whom he could establish new relationships. He also found renewed love for his stepmother.

Antie Boy found meaning through doing something useful for somebody else (i.e. his stepmother and others) and searching for himself. He gained insight knowing himself and indicated that he had positive aspirations and attitude. He realised there were people who loved him (“I saw myself as somebody that ... Who can change, even change some people’s lives ... there’s a lot I want to achieve in life, as I said. If you stay strong and positive at whatever you do, there is someone watching. There is someone who’s loving what you’re doing who is willing to help and maybe assist you”). Antie Boy was able to meet his other brothers and sisters and establish new meaningful relationships with them (“And from there ... the brother to my biological mother ... invited me from Facebook ... And we chatted from there and ... he told me he’s looking for his brother, looking at my details ... and he found that I am his brother. And I question him ... And he told me all stories about how these things happened ... And finally, to found out we all ... from my biological mother’s side, not raised by her ... and that is where I started a friendship with my brothers and sisters”). In addition, he was able to remain appreciative of and loving towards his stepmother. He would confess this about her: “But what makes me happy ... I found ... my family and I’m still living with my stepmother and still happy, as I was during life ... Nothing has changed. I’m still her son, she’s still my mother ... You know, I truly love her”.

In offering meaningful support to his mother, he said, “For me ... I think it was, I had heart ... I didn’t want to see my mother heartbroken ... I truly love her. It made me hurt if I saw her sad ... and I always wanted ... to make her happy. You know, that was my dreams, to always make her happy”. In being able to be content with his life he said, “And there I was from nowhere ... to somewhere ... Ja, my life is in order now, I think. I’m in control of my life”. Antie Boy is happy in respect of the meaningful relationship he has with the mother who raised him (“But what makes me happy ... I found... my family and I’m still living with my stepmother and still happy, as I was during life [*unclear*] ... Nothing has changed. I’m still her son, she’s still my mother”.

Antie Boy was still struggling to forgive his biological mother, but realised that it was important and he was willing to try (“For me, for now ... I’m still facing difficult times ... to forgive her, but I’m trying now, my best now, to just forgive her. Maybe she has ... her own reasons, you know, that I don’t know”).

## **6.2.18 Participant 18: Kim2**

### **6.2.18.1 Background information**

Kim2 was also identified and recruited through the gatekeeper organisation responsible for identifying, amongst other criteria, young financially disadvantaged upcoming athletes that has the potential of becoming elite athletes. The interview session took place at the only venue available at that time, namely the cafeteria of the local sport academy where she stayed and which was luckily empty at the time. There was however considerable background noise inside the cafeteria's kitchen due to staff preparing for lunchtime. The time was limited due to her other scheduled commitments. As a result, the interview was very short and there was no time available for her to create a RoL drawing. Kim2 presented herself with confidence and was straightforward and clear in answering the research question. She was also very polite.

### **6.2.18.2 Summary of Kim2's story**

Kim2 is a 33 year old Coloured female who is employed as an embroiderer. She has been a very successful elite athlete in the past, but due to changed circumstances she experienced quite a low point financially and emotionally. She experienced loss of income and support, homelessness, breakdown in familial interpersonal relationships, media reprisal and resentment, substance misuse, personal feelings of guilt, and financial difficulties. Kim2 has been able to overcome her circumstances and is once again on a new high point in her sport. She has been called up for participation in the national team. Through humility, faith in God and forgiveness towards herself she managed to come out of her low point. She also obtained a job and regained support from others. She is positive, focussed, hopeful and confident about achieving her dreams and goals in life.

### **6.2.18.3 RoL drawing and SBIQ information**

The interview session took  $\pm 10$  minutes. The current researcher managed to record sufficient information, but could not obtain much in-depth information. At various places the participant's speech was unclear due to the quality of the recording. Kim2 did not specifically mention a turning-point, but was asked directly by the researcher if she could remember a turning-point, to which she then responded.

Her description of how she understands 'quality of life' is as follows: "Get up each day with dreams and goals". With regard to the rating scale questions (See Appendix D) she rated herself as **happy**, **religious**, and **neutral** in terms of the importance of personal status. On the different aspects, she

rated herself as follows: **Perseverance: 6; Caring: 6; Giving: 6; Positive attitude: 6; and General quality of life: 6.**

#### **6.2.18.4 Discussion of themes**

In Kim2's story, the dominant themes in moving from a low point to a high point were self-reflection, positive attitude, focus, goal-orientated (drive/push), support from, doing something, and meaning. In Kim2's story, the sub-themes in support of her main themes were faith/religious belief (God), hope, humbleness and forgiveness.

Kim2's low point was being homeless and unemployed, not participating in sport, receiving negative media attention and having personal and financial difficulties. She used aspects, described as themes in this study, to assist her in moving beyond her low point towards her high point. Kim2 indicated that she had been able to keep a positive attitude, in spite of her dire circumstances, and that this kept her going. She said, "The low point was dreadful. Having to come from [*unclear*] South Africa, to drop down to being [*humble*] again. So, it was really a trying time ... And I think that, no matter what you go through, [*when you crash through stages*] is that you know, there's light at the end of the tunnel ... I put into the sport and that was just how it [*unclear – came*] together ... [*unclear*] got together". Kim2 handled her negative emotions by taking charge of her situation and doing something about it (keeping busy) one day at a time. She had the support of friends and managed to change negatives into positives, such as finding accommodation and a job. She focussed on the positive, had a positive attitude and kept on participating in sport, which helped her release anger and frustration.

Kim2 also pointed out that she was driven and determined in moving forward. She said, "... and this is what keeps me going. [*Unclear*] pushing right...?" Kim2 realised that she had changed considerably and this helped her to cope with her low point of being homeless and jobless. Her approach towards dealing with challenges, such as her low points, revealed her ability to face them head-on and confidently. She was driven to sort out her various difficulties within a relatively short period of time. She took action in changing her circumstances ("I always keep myself busy [*unclear*]. I get my head up"). Kim2 started playing sport again to deal with her frustrations of the negative low point. In moving away from her low point experience, she found accommodation and a job, was called up for the national team's training camp in a new sport in which she could learn something new. She was focussed and took life one day at a time. She said, "The turning-point was when I started playing [*mentions her sport*] ... Starting point ... I'm learning about the sport, obviously ... I was just staying focussed ... staying focussed [*one day at a time*]".



Kim2 was offered support from friends in providing her with a place to stay. Other people, her employer and the sport organisation provided relief from her low point in supporting her to move towards a new high point once again. She said, “So, I was actually [unclear] [by that time] homeless, which actually still [unclear] because renting a room from someone ... because of my low point ... I moved around [unclear] [to places] ... get some advice ... Starting point ... when I had friends helping me [unclear]. I couldn’t believe it ... got a place to stay for me”.

To Kim2 meaning implied having a positive attitude, especially about the future, and obtaining personal, religious or spiritual growth. She said, “Every day ... [unclear] [good] things happen ... I get my head up. And you know, people, [unclear] ... positive [phase/things] now. And that is good for me ... but I’ve changed dramatically ... I got closer to God ... I would no longer go onto booze or drugs in order to keep myself steady ... I got a job in the meantime ... And then, that brings me to the next point, where I am now. Got a different job. That was [unclear] when I got pulled into here. So, things happened [quite fast] in a short period of time”. Kim2 had faith in God, and stopped using drugs and alcohol. Through her faith in God she was closer to Him. She was able to forgive herself, although it took some time. She found meaning in forgiveness (“It took a long time to [forgive] myself [unclear]. So, I got closer to God in that time”). Kim2 also had hope and expecting something good to happen, believing that there is always light at the end of the tunnel.

Giving up alcohol and drugs had the positive effect of spiritual growth and moving away from negative things in her life; she also started acting positively towards herself. She said, “The low point was dreadful. Having to come from [unclear] South Africa, to drop down to being [humble] again. So, it was really a trying time. It took a long time to [forgive] myself... So, I got closer to God in that time... I would no longer go onto booze or drugs in order to keep myself steady”.

Kim2 was humbled by her situation. She described it as being dropped from a (previous) higher position and being (exposed) in the media. In spite of this, she was able to endure it (“The low point was dreadful. Having to come from [unclear] South Africa, to drop down to being [humble] again ... So, it was really a trying time ... [Not much to say], because [unclear] ... the media for the whole of last year and being like this ... [unclear] ... So, at this point [unclear] myself so much [unclear] ... the last one ... the media [unclear] the low point”.

## **6.2.19 Participant 19: Jack**

### **6.2.19.1 Background information**

Jack was also identified and recruited through the gatekeeper organisation responsible for identifying, amongst other criteria, young financially disadvantaged upcoming athletes that has the potential of becoming elite athletes. He did not elaborate on his experience of discrimination during the interview. Although he had a rough and bumpy road earlier on in his life before going to the Paralympics, the latter part of his life story is filled with success, fulfilment, and positive expectation. He dreamed of going to the London Olympics in 2012, and although it seemed unachievable at first, he was able to attend in the end and he set a world record. Jack aspires to inspire others.

### **6.2.19.2 Summary of Jack's story**

Jack is a 24 year old Coloured male who is still a student. His low point started with when he was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at an early age and experiencing discrimination because of this condition during his school years. Jack was very determined to participate in sport and persisted in achieving success. He started performing well in sports during school by setting a record in athletics. However, he had to face and overcome various difficulties in following his dream to participate in the Paralympics later on in his life. He characterised his low point as consisting of a few points, such as financial difficulties, lack of transport and proper training for his sport, mismanagement of his finances, his disability and experience of overall personal stress and negative thoughts. He managed to receive a sponsorship and through perseverance was able to compete in the Paralympics, where he obtained various medals. His achievements on the sport field led to numerous rewards and ensured that he has achieved a significant high point in his life. He has confidence and is motivated to achieve even more. Faith also plays a significant and very important role in his life.

### **6.2.19.3 RoL drawing and SBIQ information**

The interview session took place within an office of one of the local churches in the town where the participant and current researcher met. The RoL drawing took  $\pm 25$  minutes to complete. He drew a fruit bearing tree with roots into an underground pool, an axe, a dark cloud and the sun. The axe in Jack's drawing represented the negatives preventing him from reaching a high point. The roots of the tree, which were also indicated as a high point, symbolised his faith experience of salvation. His achievements and personal high point qualities, such as a world record, being married and

confidence and perseverance, were indicated as the fruits of the tree. He used words and sentences to describe his low and high points (See Appendix F). The interview session started directly after the RoL drawing and took  $\pm 22$  minutes. Jack did not specifically mention a turning-point, but was asked by the researcher if he could remember a turning-point, to which he then responded.

His description of how he understands ‘quality of life’ is as follows: “QOL speaks about your meaning and purpose behind your life. It is about how much enjoyment and happiness you experience. It is being satisfied with who you are and what you do. Self-worth is key and discovering your individual quality of life”. In terms of the rating scale questions (See Appendix D) he rated himself as **happy**, **religious**, and **neutral** in terms of the importance of personal status. On the different aspects, he rated himself as follows: **Perseverance: 9; Caring: 7; Giving: 6; Positive attitude: 10; and General quality of life: 8.**

#### 6.2.19.4 Discussion of themes

In Jack’s story, the dominant themes in moving from a low point to a high point were self-thought (awareness), positive self-talk, goal-orientated/dream, passion/drive, persistence/perseverance, doing something, and meaning. In Jack’s story, the sub-themes in support of his main themes were faith/religious belief (God – salvation) and support from.

Jack’s general low point was his disability, and personal and financial difficulties. There were aspects present in his life to overcome his low point and move towards his high point. Jack became aware of his talents during his early years (“... and I knew, that I am actually talented ... to be able to be selected for the team. But when I was fourteen, I discovered that I have [*mentions sporting activity*] talent”). This awareness stayed with him and would ultimately make him realise this capacity and help him attend the Paralympics in 2012 (“But in 2008, while seeing the people compete at the Beijing 2008 Paralympics, I realised that I have ... the capacity and I have the ability to be able to compete at such an event ... to go to the Paralympic Games. And, actually I told my friends at that stage, 2012, I’m going to the Paralympic Games”).

The awareness of his talents and abilities was visible in the confidence he displayed when he participated in the Paralympics. He said, “So, I went into the Paralympic Games thinking, ‘while I’m going to the Paralympic Games, I will definitely medal in the [*mentions sporting activity*]’. Because ... I broke the world record also. And then I thought that, ‘I will work for a medal in the [*mentions sporting activity*]’, because I was fourth and then ‘I will maybe get a medal in the [*mentions sporting activity*]’. So, going into the Paralympic Games, at that stage. At the end of the year, I exceeded my expectations, or in the end of the games, because then I got a silver medal in

the [mentions sporting activity] and the [mentions sporting activity]. I ran African records in the [mentions sporting activity] and the [mentions sporting activity] and the [mentions sporting activity], although I equalled the world record. I didn't get a gold, but a bronze, because of the points system that was in there. So, that was a huge achievement for me, the Paralympic Games". Being aware of his talents groomed his self-confidence and belief in himself.

Jack realised that his full ability to perform not utilised, but that he had the talent ("And particularly when I started in the sport in primary school, my mother and my father didn't want me to participate in sports. Because they were scared that I would maybe get an injury or get hurt while participating in sport. The teachers as well, didn't want me to do athletes [athletics] ... also ... they withheld some of the activities. They said, 'no, they don't want me to do certain things because of my disability ... But when I was 14, I discovered that I have [mentions sporting activity] talent").

Jack's positive self-thought was about being aware of his talents, positively evaluating himself and having self-confidence. In being positive, he overcame the challenge of being disabled and accomplished many achievements. Jack's positive self-talk was related to and followed his positive self-thought. He was very positive that he would accomplish those achievements he set out before him. He also indicated that he was able to turn previous negative self-talk into positive self-talk and persevere. He said, "There was definitely a turning-point for me ... in my low point preparing ... for Paralympics ... in the sense that there were times that I wanted to give up and there were times that I just told myself, 'it's not worth it ... going through these difficult times', but it felt like almost always on the edge ... then I would say, 'no, I will still go on and still persevere'. 'I must hold on, because at the end of the day, I want to go to the Paralympics and I can do [good] in the Paralympics'".

Jack's positive attitude originated from awareness and positive self-thought about his talents, his positive evaluation of himself, and the achievements he accomplished ("At that stage, it was something I was proud about, because ... for my school career ... in 2008 it was also a high for me in my life. Because then I broke the school record in the [mentions sporting activity]. That school record stood for years and I was privileged to break it. And that was a huge honour for me at that time, to be able to prove, once again, that I am able to achieve. So, that was huge").

Jack had the passion and drive to continue participating in sport in spite of being disabled and having to go through difficulties. He was urged internally to do sport and pursued his dream passionately. Through this passion, he was able to achieve many accomplishments and he won various medals during his sporting career. He said, "... they ... didn't want me to do athletes

[*athletics*], but inside of me, was really that urge to do athletics. So, that in a way transformed my thinking in a ... large way ... and I knew, that I am actually talented ... to be able to be selected for the team”.

Jack handled his negative emotions in having small achievements that built his confidence and made him more positive as he moved forward. He also kept on working hard. His faith in Jesus Christ (i.e. God) was also indicated as the source of positive fruits, such as perseverance, confidence and inspiration of others. His dream kept him going as well. He had support, but also wanted to prove himself to others from a young age. He was able to reach unexpected achievements in spite of difficulties and his disability. He said, “So, I had this tendency to want to prove to people that I am better. Sometimes it was in the positive sense and sometimes it was in the negative sense, as well, in that I always wanted to be the best”).

Jack’s dream was to compete in the 2012 Paralympics. He was very dedicated, pursuing it diligently through perseverance and hard work. He said, “I was still developing and pushing my body on a different level... elite level’. He set out to achieve, and he did. In spite of setbacks, Jack was able to continue to achieve his dream. Jack’s drive was visible through an internal urge, passion and attitude to prove himself in his sport. It enabled him to achieve in spite of being disabled and discriminated against, having setbacks and difficulties regarding not being chosen for the team or having all the resources to practise properly (“I was chosen in that same year, for ... the first team ... rugby team and we went to a tournament. But they didn’t play me at all ... I was competitive by nature ... in a large way my attitude was just to prove myself ... because in many cases, I felt that people are discriminating and withholding some things because of my disability. So, I had this tendency to want to prove to people that I am better ... So ... that is my school experience”).

In doing something, Jack managed to move away from his low point through participating in sport, but especially by competing in the Paralympics. The sport achievements during his school years contributed in moving towards his high point. He had to overcome difficulties, but he was dedicated. Through his faith in God (Jesus Christ), he was able to persevere and start bearing the fruit of achievement. Jack also studied and wanted to inspire others, indicating a further separation from his low point and a movement closer to his high point. Jack’s achievements during difficult times motivated him to persevere and continue his journey towards the high point and perform to his full potential, which he realised he had. Jack’s persistence and perseverance was particularly evident in his preparation for the Paralympic Games when he was travelling far (“So, I started training ... but I lived in [*unclear*] [*Kuils River*] and I had to travel from Kuils River to Stellenbosch every day ... to training. And there were times that it was very tough for me ... to even train”).

Other setbacks, such as injury, also challenged Jack, but he was able to persevere (“And then, also in that time ... I got injuries. For instance ... ham string injuries and so forth. And because I didn’t have finances in place, I didn’t have the correct treatment at that stage. So, that was extremely difficult”).

Jack found meaning in his turning-point experience through personal and sporting success, perseverance and being able to inspire others. He said, “... going to high school, I was now a bit more mature ... circumstances had the potential ... to cut down my dream ... So, the fruits in my life I will see as the success... that I’ve got in my 30’s. I’m married now ... I have a baby. The fruits are perseverance... the world record in the [*mentions sporting activity*]. I’m able to inspire others. So ... that is my fruits that I’ve got in my life”.

Meaning was also seen as not giving up when circumstances were unfavourable and building on previous successes (“There were times that I wanted to give up ... going through these difficult times ... then there came a ... Maybe one competition there was just ... I just had a ‘moerse’ [*massive*] jump or I had an amazing time in the [*mentions sporting activity*] or [*mentions sporting activity*] and immediately after that ... hold on ... So, that was always the thing there ... when something good happened, then ... I wanted to go further and wanted to pursue that [*unclear*] [*win*]”).

Jack’s religious experience of salvation was a major turning-point in his life [indicated on his RoL drawing]. In describing the results, or high point achievements of his faith in Jesus Christ, he used the descriptive and colourful picture of fruit [also drawn on the RoL drawing]. His faith led to his negative circumstances (i.e. the axe) not effecting him in the end, and him being able to persevere in pursuing a dream and self-transcend his circumstances by being successful and able to be an inspiration to others (“When I was fifteen years old, I came to salvation. So, I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour ... and I believe that is the thing ... that fed my life to where it is now ... And I wouldn’t have achieved the fruits there ... I came to salvation ... And I do it ... as an underwater like, pool ... and I believe that is the thing that ... fed my life to where it is now ... maybe possible for me to be able to have fruits now growing in my life ... The fruits are perseverance ... the sun for me is my dream [*referring to the RoL drawing*]”).).

Lastly, Jack’s received support from sponsors to study and train properly for elite level competition. Further support in relation to this was from his coach. He said, “And then, after that a year ... I wanted to study directly after ... my school year. But unfortunately, due to funds, I couldn’t do that and that was something very bad for me. The year after that, I was fortunate that I got a sponsor to

be able to study ... But eventually ... beginning 2012 ... I got a [*open*] sponsorship from SASCOC. So, that took that cloud immediately out of the picture, because I was able to live in a very nice place ... in a very nice flat. And the food ... was better. Later that year, somebody sponsored me a car, so that changed the whole picture. So, I wasn't that fatigued any more. Although I had studies, I had better nutrition. I could go to physio ... if I had an injury, I could access gym. So, I could train and so forth. So, that changed my whole picture and now all of a sudden this London dream ... was visible for me again, because the cloud ... was taken away ... And that's when the London 2012 Paralympics came, which I see ... as the high. Because my dream was then realised and I went into the Paralympic Games ... So, I started training with [*mention coach's name*], my coach ... And then, with a year and a half's ... actually a year's training ... that changed my whole perception or my whole life situation".

### **6.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter the findings of the individual participant stories were presented. It was presented through background information, RoL drawing and SBIQ information, and detailed discussion of the themes. How these individual stories compared to one another regarding similarities and/or differences, will be discussed in the next chapter as part of the integration of the stories, which led to the interpretation of the results and the composition of a theme-model.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **DISCUSSION OF PARTICIPANTS' THEMES AS A THEME-MODEL: INTEGRATION AND CONCLUSION**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, a detailed discussion will be presented wherein the themes of individual participants are compared and integrated with each other, as well as integrated with additional information obtained from the RoL drawings, researcher notes and reflections, context and rags to riches background stories, other supportive information, and finally information from literature (the theoretical perspective). The information provided here, resulted from the second phase of the analysis procedure. An in-depth picture of the psychological and spiritual aspects experienced and presented in participants' life-stories will be provided. The aim is to highlight the discoveries made through this study to enable others in similar situations or contexts to affect change or a turning-point experience in their lives. In other words, to assist others to move from a negative low point experience to a positive high point experience based on the examples provided by this study's participants. The main shared/common or repeated themes and certain unique themes that emerged from this research study will be discussed within a theme-model. The advantage of this model, along with the benefits and value of the current study, will be indicated.

The turning-point experiences of participants are presented in the form of a theme-model that consists of the main/common themes (indicated with a numeric number, for example, Theme 1) and unique themes (indicated with an alphabetic letter, for example Theme A). The main themes were shared by the majority of participants, while the unique themes were not shared with others or only shared by some. The unique themes will be presented in support of the main themes, contributing additional information and value to them and providing the reader with an integrated picture of the ideal aspects to have and utilise in similar situations to move from a low point to a high point in their lives.

Final comments on contextualising the theme-model in terms of participants, rags to riches stories and creating one's destiny will be made. The limitations of the study, as well as future directions for research will be discussed. Finally, the chapter will be concluded by indicating how the study relates to QOL and the implications and contributions of the study to existing knowledge highlighted.



## 7.2 Participants' intense experience of their low points

The first theme identified through the analysis of the individual interview transcripts, was the **participants' intense experience of the low point**. Although the research question asked that participants should describe their low point experiences (along with their high point experiences), with the aim to investigate (identify, describe and understand) the aspects or themes involved in enabling a participant to move from the low to the high point (the turning-point experience), the researcher realised that a common theme emerged from all participants. This was the theme of an 'intense' or 'strong/deeply felt' low point experience by all participants. The fact that participants described their low point experiences with intense or powerfully loaded words, and that many of the turning-point aspects the researcher were interested in originated from within this experience, motivated him to consider their richly described low point experiences. This would then appear to be an important theme to consider as background context to understanding the themes.

Thus, the theme of participant's intense experience of the low point, was a common theme throughout, but differed from participant to participant in terms of their individual and unique intensity of the experience. Intensity here does not refer to the degree of intenseness, as on a scale from low to high, but rather describes the expression of low point with strongly and loaded words. The fact that participants described their low point in such a way confirmed that their low points were significant to them.

Participants were also asked to indicate their low and high points on their RoL drawings. Their drawings were unique and a variety of illustrations of different depictions of a 'river of life' containing their low and high points were obtained. Some participants indicated more than one low or high point. Some also did not specifically label them as such, but through closer inspection and consideration of the interview information provided, the researcher could identify these points presented as text on the RoL drawings. It could be seen from the analysed low points that participants had more than one point-in-time low point experiences, mostly presented in descriptive or 'expressive and loaded' terms; this was also confirmed during the interviews.

In combination, the group of participants presented thirty-one low point experiences. These combined low points provided the contextual background to which the stories told belonged, and they can assist the reader to understand, in detail, the type of scenarios to which the aspects identified within this study can be applied.

### 7.3 Preparation for low point experience

One of the themes discovered through the stories of most participants, was the theme **preparation for low point experience**. This theme emerged from the participants' stories in providing positive aspects within their backgrounds (such as previous positive high points; support of close relationships; love for sport; persistence to continue with their dream; plans of escape; success; education; doubt about future; faith/belief/religion; very positive experience; positive attitude; previous sport achievements; support; positive/'good' upbringing; and playing a certain type of sport). This theme was identified through analysis of the interview transcripts (along with consideration of the RoL drawings), as presented by participants. Basically, the theme concerns the background provided by participants prior to their low point experiences, and specifically in terms of having positive experiences prior to having their negative low point experiences. Positive experiences also included aspects such as overcoming a low point previously or knowing of someone else who did; advice from significant others on how to proceed during difficult times; having had an earlier and consistent positive attitude or outlook in life, having experienced previous significant achievements, or having had faith in the past or being religious for a while.

This theme was however not presented in all the stories (thirteen of the nineteen stories), but it was considered by the researcher to have potential significance because it could have had an effect on how participants experienced their low point(s) and enabled them to move beyond it towards their high point(s). However, the study focussed on the turning-point experiences and not the detail regarding the low points or experiences prior to it.

### 7.4 Participants' meaningful experience of the high point

In contrast to the participants' ability to describe more accurately their definite identifiable low points, describing definite high points were more challenging and sometimes slightly less clear. Although the research aim did not include identifying and describing the low or high points in detail, it was a primary requirement of the study for participants to have reached a significant high point related to and following a significant low point. In terms of the context of the study, it was important to have an understanding of the low as well as the high point(s) of participants. The researcher therefore intuitively analysed participants' high points as well. It is clear from the analysis of data that the participants sometimes had more than one point-in-time high point experience.

It was found that a few of the participants did not indicate a definite high point, but were of a strong opinion that they were on their way to such a point. For the researcher this was an indication that

they had already started to experience a change compared to their low point experience(s), and specifically regarding the intensity thereof. Furthermore, through closer inspection during the analyses of their interviews and as mentioned in their storytelling, the researcher found that they have reached, although not clearly indicated by them as such, ‘smaller, but significant’ high points. Some of the participants also mentioned that they had already reached some (‘smaller’) high point(s) prior to the interview, while they are still on their way to a (‘greater or ultimate’) high point.

Only one of the participants (Kim) explicitly indicated in words that she has not reached her high point yet, which technically meant that she did not fully qualify as a participant for this study. Her story, however, was unique in as far as she was sexually exploited, and physically confined and threatened, which most probably made her low point experience more intense and personal in comparison to the others. Despite this, it was decided to maintain her as a participant, as her unique story could contribute significantly to the research findings. Although she was not aware of having reached or being able to describe a definitive high point in her own words, managing to ‘escape her low point experience’, along with her achievements thereafter, proved to be significant (although perhaps a ‘smaller’ high point). She did indicate that she was strong after everything she had endured and did not cry about it anymore.

In general, as expected, participants’ descriptions of their high points differed in terms of being one moment-in-time point to being an extended point-over-time. It also differed in terms of the intensity thereof, the level (according to societal standards) at which it occurred, being something that could be externally observed or only internally experienced, as well as either being personal, psychological or spiritual. Reaching a definite high point-in-time after experiencing a low point seemed difficult to identify or describe. It seemed that to some of the participants it was seen as an ultimate point (already reached or to be reached in future). Many of the participants regarded their high points as a state of having reached a goal or a dream. To many of the participants it involved having or achieved measureable success and/or having obtained a certain status level (for example, being selected for a team, or appointed and employed), but various participants lacked the ‘intense’ descriptions of the experiences as compared to the low point(s) experience. In contrast to the low points, most participants did not provide such rich descriptions of their high point experience(s). In conclusion, it was evident that clearly describing the high point as a definitive point-in-time was sometimes challenging.

One way of answering the question to when a high point would have been reached, from a positive psychological point of view, would be to say when the low point experience had been ‘turned

around' (meaning a negative experience has been changed into a positive experience). In other words, the low point experience was 'cancelled out' by the high point experience, meaning the positive high point experience over-ruled the negative low point experience of the past – the participants have moved significantly away from the low point(s).

What also emerged from the study's findings was that all participants presented the theme of **meaning**. All the participants indicated that, as part of their turning-point experiences, they have obtained/experienced some form of meaning, often closely related to the high point experience. Therefore, as soon as meaning was experienced in relation to a significant low point in the past, there was evidence that a significant high point was reached in the participant's life. The researcher concluded that for this study, assigning meaning to a low point experience, by the participants themselves, was the first indication that a high point was reached, and that the time it took to move from a low point to high point depended on how long it took participants to attach meaning to their low point experiences.

These meaningful experiences were all positive and would thus become an important finding of the study, namely that, people who have been able to move from rags to riches have experienced positive meaning, which enabled them to move (away) from a previously intense low point experience towards (reaching) a high point. Meaning, according to literature is associated with fulfilment, purpose in life and especially eudaimonic well-being (Austin et al., 2013; Frankl, 1992; Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2002).

It was therefore not important to have reached an ultimate high point (mostly seen as something still to be reached and in future), but, if not definitively indicated by the participant as a high point, to have reached an experience where the significance of the low point was cancelled out and/or meaning was obtained or experienced in closure to the low point experience. Thereby, it would imply that the researcher had to view the high point experience as a more fluid process that could be reached in various degrees of intensity and that having such an experience meant having cancelled the significance of the past negative low experience(s) and/or having found some significant positive meaning in relation to it.

### **7.5 Making sense of participants' low point(s), turning-point(s) and high point(s)**

Each participant's story was unique. The uniqueness of each story was explored in detail through analysing each participant's story individually. The time-lines between low point(s) and high point(s), the duration of a turning-point, the definitive nature of low point(s) and/or high point(s), or

having reached an ultimate high point or only partially but continuing to reach it, were some of the differences found amongst the individual stories.

Following the individual analyses, the stories were re-analysed in combination with each other, and repeated (main) and unique themes were identified. By re-looking at the unique themes identified for each participant, the themes were considered in terms of other participants' themes to look for similarities. This led to certain themes being re-coded to reveal main themes that were common to the group of participants in total. Certain unique themes were identified that complemented the main themes, thereby providing a more in-depth understanding of the themes. In the end, a **theme-model** was formulated as a representation for understanding the total group's turning-point experiences, presenting an example to others who are at a low point experience to help them **create** their own high point experience(s).

Although the theme 'participant's intense experience of the low point' was common to each individual's story, it was found that this theme would function as the background within which each individual's turning-point would start (See Appendix J). Most participants started talking about their low point experience, as requested by the research question or suggested by the researcher, at the beginning of the interview. As the stories progressed towards the high point(s), the turning-point experience(s) started emerging. The research focus was to identify and describe the turning-point aspects in their stories and therefore the researcher did not focus too much on the high points themselves. In summary, therefore, the low point(s) served as the contextual environment within which the turning-point aspects started emerging, while the high point(s) served as the contextual environment within which the turning-point aspects were realised. The high point(s) reached would serve as an indicator that the low point(s) situation has been 'turned' or 'changed' around and, in addition, would also provide the contextual environment within which participants found meaning. Therefore, in terms of the humanistic approach, reaching a significant high point meant a participant had experienced meaning fulfilment. From the positive psychological viewpoint, it meant a participant had transcended beyond the boundaries or limitation as experienced within the negative low point, had surpassed it and rose above it or mastered it in achieving a higher goal or purpose, thereby finding spiritual meaning in the high point(s) reached.

In a way, what the study is suggesting through the participants' experiences is that the high points containing meaning and seen as their destinies, were spiritual in nature. In creating their own destiny, that is, to move away from or beyond their negative low point(s) towards (a) contrasting positive high point(s), each participant found spiritual meaning. Thus, the ultimate positive contemplation of a negative low point experience in one's life may be regarded as the beginning of

a journey towards finding spiritual meaning, if a positive will to meaning fulfilment is applied. This finding is in line with the opinion of Krägeloh et al. (2011) regarding spiritual experience, being part of a “lifelong quest for meaning and direction” (p. 91).

## 7.6 The theme-model

**Table 1.** Theme-model indicating the main and unique (sub-) themes

NUMBER	MAIN THEME	LETTER	UNIQUE THEME
1	Minding oneself/introspection (Awareness, realisation, acceptance, deciding, taking responsibility)		
		A	Identity and independence
2	Specific positive attributes of oneself (Self-thought, self-talk, attitude)		
		B	Humour, fun, happy-go-lucky
		C	Positive emotions (Passion and control over negative emotions e.g. anger, hurt, disappointment, loss)
		D	Positively future-orientated (Dreams and goal-orientated)
		E	Drive (Motivation, perseverance, challenge/competing)
3	Support (From and to)		
4	Acting or creating (Doing something)		
5	Spiritual: Faith, religion (God)		
		F	Virtues (Hope, forgiveness, appreciation, honesty, patience, humbleness)
6	Meaning (Personal and spiritual growth, achievement, fulfilment, wisdom, value)		

The main themes along with some of the unique (dominating) themes will be discussed in detail as a theme-model. For the creation of this model, the themes from the individual participant interview transcripts were combined and adapted to include fewer, but more sensible themes. The theme-model can be presented in the form of a table (see Table 1).

## 7.7 Detailed discussion of the theme-model

### 7.7.1 Theme 1: Minding oneself/introspection (Awareness, realisation, acceptance, deciding, and taking responsibility)

This theme emerged as dominant theme through analysis and comprises of the intra-psychological processes that took place within participants that originated within the intense low point experience. This term is very similar to the concept of mindfulness, but excluded being mindful of others. This theme intends to describe a process of purposefully and intentionally paying attention to oneself, being open and sensitive to oneself within one's circumstances, not harshly judging oneself within one's situation, while having some form of compassion and acceptance towards oneself. **Minding oneself** also includes intentional **awareness** about oneself, **realising** something about oneself, obtaining insight and knowledge about oneself (Raffo, 2014). In this study, **taking responsibility** and **deciding** to do something as part of conscious thinking to alleviate one's low point experience, were also included as part of this theme. Minding oneself was present in participants' experiences regarding their feelings, thoughts and senses (Train et al., 2009). This finding was in line with Maslow (cited in Moore, 2013) pointing out that self-knowledge, insight, and being aware (especially of one's own needs) were necessary for self-actualisation to take place.

Minding oneself is accomplished by **introspection** or "subjective inner observation" (Viljoen, 2013a, p. 31). Inner observations included the way participants saw and thought about themselves (excluding the self-concept), within certain conditions or circumstances, in this case relating to their low point experience. Most participants became aware of themselves and their emotions, thoughts, abilities, talents, strengths, weaknesses and preferences.

The process of becoming mindful also involved realisation (or recognition/comprehension/understanding) of internal thoughts relating to a specific situation or circumstance, being understood by or making sense to the person, providing a solution or answer to a problem or problematic question, and being realised in becoming 'reality to that person at a specific moment-in-time. This would in laymen's terms be referred to as having or experiencing an '*a-ha*' moment. In the study, it was also sometimes accompanied by feelings of relief and being in a state of contentment or being relaxed. Another element of this process was **acceptance**, which in this study

meant to be sensitive towards one's own circumstances and oneself within the low point circumstances, suspending one's own harsh judgements for a while in order to find peace or a solution within the circumstances – in other words, accommodating the circumstances as it is and accepting the solutions that present themselves spontaneously. From the positive psychological viewpoint, it does not mean one denies the existence of negatives, but tries to find the solution(s) that would remove oneself from the circumstances and take one towards a positive point in future.

For this study, **deciding** or decision-making formed part of this theme. Deciding or “identifying, evaluating and choosing amongst several alternatives” (Ciccarelli & White, 2017, p. 296) to solve a problem, resulted in steering a participant into a certain direction (away from or in handling the low point experience). Deciding required the participants to think and then act in a certain way, with the expectation that their choices were those with the most advantages, holding the best solution(s) to their problems and having a positive outcome (Train et al., 2009). According to Frankl (1966), the freedom of making a decision towards fulfilment of personal meaning motivates a person to accomplish it.

The element of **taking responsibility** was related to deciding and formed part of the minding oneself/introspection theme. In this study, it implied that participants recognised their personal involvement in or connection to their circumstances and felt obligated to take charge thereof, to do something about them, or change them around. In various cases participants in this study equated taking responsibility with taking care of others. Their unique human freedom to make decisions and take responsibility for their own lives, provided purpose and meaning to their experiences (Frankl, 1969).

The reason why this was a very dominant theme in this study, is that almost all of the participants in some way or form had an intrapersonal (or internal) introspective experience that led them to start moving away from the low point and/or towards the high point. This theme was closely connected to the participants' low point(s) experience(s), often originating within their experience(s) itself. It could be construed that this theme was a pre-requisite to or a starting point of the turning-point experience. Although the study did not confirm that all participants presented this theme in its totality, it showed that all participants did have some form of subjective process taking place within them. They were paying attention to themselves, and/or introspectively observing, being aware, realising or accepting something about themselves within their circumstances and making certain important decisions or taking personal responsibility to change their circumstances in relation to their own low point experience(s).



#### **7.7.1.1 Theme A: Identity and independence**

This unique theme was a supporting theme to the main theme, namely minding oneself/introspection. **Identity** generally refers to the image one has of oneself or how one perceives oneself and is related to one's self-concept (Baron & Branscombe, 2012; Ciccarelli & White, 2017). In this study, it related to the concepts of introspection, self-awareness, self-realisation, and self-reflection within a certain context such as physical, social, familial and/or working context. This term (or element) of the theme was chosen to describe participants' need to know or be themselves for who they were and/or search for and obtain answers about their own identity in relation to a certain context. This was especially visible in Anti Boy's life where he wanted to know who he was (internal processing of thoughts about his identity), and this moved him to go out and search for his identity.

The second term (or element) of this theme, was **independence**. This term generally refers to being self-sustaining and relatively independent of one's physical and/or social environment or circumstances (Moore, 2013). In terms of Maslow's theory of self-actualisation, independence is associated with autonomy, which implies a person is self-determining, in other words free to direct her or his own life. To be independent, provided motivation for and (in hindsight) a reason for why some participants have been able to overcome their low points. This theme was especially visible in two participants' turning-point experiences, namely Trish and Limna. Their stories implied that, to achieve independence within one's high point experience, be it one's work, finances, education, or taking care of others, thoughts about or the needs for independence must form through an internal process, aspiring to change from being dependent to becoming independent.

#### **7.7.2 Theme 2: Specific positive attributes of oneself (Self-thought, self-talk, attitude)**

The second main theme was closely related to the first main theme and consisted of having certain positive attributes that enabled participants to move away from the low point towards the high point. It is suggested that the specific attributes (or elements) of this theme are a result of the intra-psychological processes that took place within the participants. Where the first theme can be regarded as the first step towards positive change, the second theme is a further qualification of internal processes taking place within the individual by experiencing specific positive attributes that can be used to move forward positively. This theme displays two characteristics: firstly, it has particularly positive elements, and secondly, it encompasses specific internal attributes, qualities or characteristics one possesses that affect one's external behaviour.

**Self-thought** refers to “forming one’s own opinions ... of independent judgement” (Self-thought, 2018). Positive self-thought is a term referring to the specific thinking processes that take place within the individual to derive at one or more than one positive thought. Many of the participants in this study had positive thoughts (self-thought) about moving away from the low point experience, and also thought positively about themselves, their abilities, potential, talents and future achievements. In general, they were positive in thinking within the turning-point and towards the high point(s).

**Self-talk** is defined as “the act or practice of talking to oneself, either aloud or silently and mentally” (Self-talk, 2018, p. 1). Positive self-talk refers to things said in encouraging or motivating oneself, which may be in the form of phrases, mantras or continuous inner talking (Self-talk, 2018). Positive self-talk in this study refers to the process of having a conversation with oneself with a positive outcome, thereby, resulting in having something positive to say to oneself. In totality, it is intended to include the internal ‘talk’ or conversation with oneself, as well as the externally formulated and uttered words of the individual. In this study, the researcher could only work according to participants’ positively uttered words and from there had to assume that the spoken words were a representation of their inner self-talk/conversations. Self-talk thus was represented in the positive words said by participants to themselves and expressed (externally) to the researcher; not necessarily the words used during internal dialogue with themselves. In this study, self-talk was often closely related with the result of self-thought. Various participants talked positively to themselves, within their turning-points towards the high point(s) and about reaching the high point(s). M, Kim, Antie Boy and Jack were participants who used positive self-talk in relation to their positive self-thought within their turning-point experience.

Attitude is defined by Ciccarelli and White (2017) as “a tendency to respond positively or negatively to a certain idea, person, object, or situation ... developed through people’s experiences ... and can include opinions, beliefs and biases” (p. 442). Attitudes are expressed through how one evaluates various aspects of the world one lives in (Baron & Branscombe, 2012). **Positive attitude** in the study referred to the tendency to respond positively towards situations or circumstances with the tendency to evaluate them positively. The positive attitude was the most prominent positive attribute amongst participants in the study. To some, such as Noel and Guy, this attitude played a significant role in assisting them to not be bothered about their disability (as low point experience). In certain cases, positive attitude was also closely related to positive self-thought/self-talk. Razz was a good example of someone who developed a positive attitude by being honest and authentic towards himself (positive self-thought), which led to positively speaking to himself and then

ultimately having a positive attitude towards things, for instance, dealing with his father's passing. Gert also had a positive attitude resulting from thinking positively. Positive attitude was also a prominent theme in the rags to riches background stories.

All participants had presented some form of positivity within their turning-point experiences, such as thinking positively, talking positively and/or having a positive attitude. Rating themselves on positive attitude was one of the closed questions of the short background information questionnaire (SBIQ). All participants rated themselves on a scale of one to 10, where one was the lowest and 10 the highest score. On average, the total group's score on positive attitude was 8.9, indicating the extreme importance this attribute had to the group as a whole.

#### **7.7.2.1 Theme B: Humour, fun, happy-go-lucky**

This unique theme was supportive to the specific positive attributes theme, and especially related to positive attitude. This theme was very strong in Noel's life, particularly regarding the **happy-go-lucky** and **humour** elements. The **fun** element was particularly present in M's life. This theme was therefore strong in their turning-point experience, especially in handling their low point experience(s). Noel had been happy-go-lucky and used humour from a young age and the day he became physically disabled; he was able to view his low point as just another part of life. For M, having fun in sport from a young age also helped her to continue with sport (having a positive attitude towards it) in spite of disappointments and setbacks experienced. Cate's passion, enjoyment and love for sport also helped her to continue with sport after her major accident and to become positive in her outlook on life again. Having a sense of humour also contributed towards her positive attitude. Guy's commitment to and enjoyment of sport led to his very positive attitude about his low point (being disabled) and set-back of not being selected for the Paralympics team. Humour, fun and being happy-go-lucky in this study therefore seemed to be closely related to having a positive attitude and/or outlook.

Although only a few participants presented this unique theme, they were of the participants who presented themselves (in comparison to others) as being strongly positive and effective in coping with their low point(s), as well as dealing with the negativities regarding it. Both Maslow (cited by Moore, 2013) and Frankl (cited in Shantall, 2013) indicated humour to be a quality of self-actualised and optimally functioning people.

#### 7.7.2.2 Theme C: Positive emotions (Passion and control over negative emotions – anger, hurt, disappointment, loss)

This unique theme emerged from combining the individual participants' themes and considering the role of emotions as studied within the positive psychology theoretical perspective. Emotion is defined as “the affective aspect of consciousness ... a state of feeling” (Emotion, 2018, p. 1). It therefore involves feelings and includes joy, anger, sorrow and fear (Train et al., 2009). The word emotion stems from the Latin word meaning ‘to move’ (Ciccarelli & White, 2017). In this sense emotions ‘move’ people to behave in a certain way. According to Seligman (2011a) **positive emotion** refers to “what we feel: pleasure, rapture, ecstasy, warmth, comfort, and other such emotions that contribute to the ‘pleasant life’” (p. 1). According to Fredrickson (2001), positive emotions include joy, interest, contentment and love. In contrast, negative emotions include feelings such as sadness, anxiety, and anger (Lyubomirsky et al., 2011, p. 77).

Included in this theme are two specific elements, namely passion, and control over negative emotions. **Passion** is defined as “any powerful or compelling emotion or feeling, as love or hate ... strong amorous feeling or desire ... a strong or extravagant fondness, enthusiasm, or desire for anything” (Passion, 2018, p. 1). Passion in this study referred to having overwhelming positive emotions in relation to what the participants preferred or liked to do. Passion did not refer to physical desire. Many participants who were practising sport showed passion or love for their sport. Passion found amongst these participants contained various positive emotions (love, joy, interest, pride, inspiration, and feeling happy). In this study, eleven of the participants' main activities were sport related. Although none of them indicated a dislike for their sport, only a few of them (M, Cate, Guy and Jack) showed they had a real passion for it, which was evident in their full commitment to sport, as shown in their persistence to train and work hard, and their consistent participation in their sport.

The negative emotions that are highlighted in this theme include the emotions experienced and relating to anger, hurt, disappointment, and/or loss. Controlling (managing and dealing with) one's emotions involves “to deal successfully with an emotion or feeling so that it does not cause a problem ... to accept and control a difficult emotional situation so that you can start to live a normal life again despite it” (Macmillan Dictionary, 2018, p. 1). According to the definition, all participants were able to do so. In this study, **control over negative emotions** referred to successfully managing an emotionally difficult situation by remaining patient, calm and in control of one's behaviour; or handling a situation wherein a lot of negative emotions are experienced, by being able to turn the situation around so that one is experiencing more positive emotions than negative ones.

Although a few of the participants seemed to still experience hurt because of what has happened to them in the past, such as Hazel and Kim, most of the participants showed that they had dealt (or at least started to deal) effectively with the negatives surrounding their low point experience(s). It would have been ignorant of the researcher not to expect that participants might be slightly affected by talking about their low points. However, even with Hazel and Kim, it seemed that this was not so significant that their interviews had to be stopped and/or the researcher had to refrain from using them as participants. Although they still may have to deal with some of their negative emotions, they indicated sufficient and enough positivity regarding their thoughts and/or feelings to remain participants in the study, and was able to cope with sharing their stories with the researcher.

Considered in totality, it also seemed that the emotional aspects related to turning-point experiences did not feature as prominently as was expected. A very interesting observation made, was that barely any of the participants indicated that happiness was a major aspect of their turning-point experience. Considered together as a group, it was revealed that positive emotions correlated with positive attributes that participants possessed, thereby indicating that having positive emotions about one's low point experience, could be an additional positive attitude (but was considered a separate theme in line with positive psychology theory). Kim had reached 'smaller high points' after her low point experience and had managed to find meaning already. She was able to speak of her experiences without exhibiting too many sad and bitter emotions, and this assured the researcher that she was all right in continuing to tell her story. Jack Lime stood out as a participant in showing how effectively he managed to control his emotions. He specifically mentioned dealing with the negative emotions he experienced during his low point by substituting them with positive emotions, which led to his positive attitude onwards. Findings in this study supported previous indicators of the positive effects of positive emotions on psychological well-being, meaning and successful outcomes/living (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Fredrickson, 2001; Lyubomirsky et al, 2011; MacLeod, 2013; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

#### **7.7.2.3 Theme D: Positively future-orientated (Dreams and goal-orientated)**

This theme was one of the more dominant unique themes, and consisted of the elements of having and pursuing **dreams** and being **goal-orientated**. The two elements suggest the same positivity related to the main theme, namely having positive dreams and goals and being positive about reaching/achieving them. Many of the participants individually presented the theme of being goal-orientated as a main theme, but in consideration of the group in total, it supported the main theme of having/possessing specific positive attributes (or in terms of positive psychology, positive

strengths). Some of the participants indicated that they saw their future goal as a dream. Taken together, the theme of having a positive orientation towards the **future** emerged.

As mentioned previously, a goal is defined as “attaining a specific standard of proficiency on a task” (Locke and colleagues cited in Gould, 2006, p. 241). Goals are future-orientated; something one strives to achieve by reaching an endpoint (MacLeod, 2013). Reaching one’s goals involves a process of engaging in activities to accomplish them (Lopez et al., 2015). Goals may be viewed in terms of purpose in life (or life’s goals), with the ultimate purpose for life to have meaning (Frankl cited in Shantall, 2013). In this study, being goal-orientated referred to being future-orientated or driven, being engaged in activities to reach a specific endpoint or goal in sport, work, education, life in general or in terms of life’s purpose, that is, to have meaning.

Most of the participants’ dreams/goals in the study were sport related and mostly something concrete. Through analysis, in uncovering the latent meaning of having dreams/goals, it was revealed that the participants had a strong future orientation. They were also driven or pulled towards achieving their dreams/goals for intrinsic reasons and not just external rewards. Sometimes it was to fulfil a life dream (e.g. for M and Jack), or due to passion for sport (e.g. for Cate and Guy). Considered in terms of moving away from a low point and/or towards a high point to achieve something, this characteristic was important in assisting them to move forward positively. This future orientation would later on be a supporting factor to achieving more than just something concrete, by also finding (deeper) meaning. Various studies support the findings of this study in regards of future/goal-directedness leading to meaning, purpose, well-being and/or success (Haworth & Hart, 2007; Leontiev, 2015; Lopez, 2015; MacLeod, 2013). Being goal/dream-orientated was a very prominent common theme in the rags to riches background stories.

#### **7.7.2.4 Theme E: Drive (Motivation, perseverance, challenge/competing)**

This unique theme, which included the elements of motivation, perseverance (or persistence) and challenge, was another theme supporting the specific positive attributes theme. Drive was a term that some of the participants used in referring to achieving their goals; changing their circumstances; continuing their sport; experiencing personal ‘highs’; keeping on going daily; or just finding meaning, enjoyment or fulfilment in what they did. Drives, in psychology, are generally associated with internal energy, instinct, drive satisfaction, or needs and need reduction (Meyer et al., 2013; Meyer & Viljoen, 2013). In this study, it is intended to be associated with being internally motivated (in accordance to humanistic theory), but with a closer association to the spiritual dimension of Frankl’s theory.

In Maslow's theory, drives are linked to needs (especially in connection with the biological or physiological needs) (Moore, 2013). In terms of Maslow's theory of needs, **drive** would be the internal motivation that moves or 'pushes' us towards being self-actualised and even self-transcended. In Frankl's theory, drives are linked to the psychological level of human functioning (Shantall, 2013). But on the spiritual level of functioning, humans can freely direct their behaviour, therefore drive can be seen as the spiritual inner force manifesting itself through one's will in becoming self-transcended or obtaining meaning in one's life. Some participants also used the term push, which was considered to have the same meaning of being **driven** or driving/pushing oneself.

Drive, which is mentioned in literature in terms of resilience, can be seen as "the force that drives a person to grow through adversity and disruptions" (Richardson cited in Foy et al., 2011, p. 92). In Seligman's (2002) PERMA-model, it involves accomplishing mastery and pursuing success. In the study, various participants showed that they were driven in being determined to direct their own behaviour towards their high points. Two examples of participants who were driven (not related to sport) were Trish and Limna, who were very poor and dependent once, but became employed, educated and financially independent to support themselves and others. In terms of sport, Cate was driven and then able to compete internationally after serious injury, while Guy, who had a disability, was driven to compete internationally in sport, received various medals, and continues to be driven to compete at the Paralympics.

Drive in the study is seen as the underlying energy or force motivating humans to behave in a certain way. This theme consists of three elements, namely **motivation**, **perseverance** (or persistence), which were also frequently presented in certain of the individuals stories, and **challenge/competing**. The first two was especially evident as factors contributing significantly to sport and academic success or achievement. Motivation was indicated to be "guided by a combination of instincts, drives, and rational conceptions" (Grieve et al., 2008, p. 179). Although motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic, the study did not pursue distinguishing between the two. However, in regarding the way that drive was presented by participants, intrinsic motivation was regarded to be dominant. For this study, extrinsic motivation was not excluded, although many participants (especially the sportspersons such as Noel and Jack) were driven by accomplishment and achieving success (external rewards) as well. The study would conclude that where intrinsic motivation was dominant; meaning found would be more intrinsic in nature, while when extrinsic motivation was applicable, meaning tended to be more extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation also suggested more spiritual meaning.

Perseverance, sometimes referred to as persistence, can be defined as “continued effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failure, or opposition: action or condition or an instance of persevering: steadfastness” (Perseverance, 2018, p. 1). Perseverance in this study referred to describing a quality assigned to one's drive or motivation in reaching the high point(s). It indicates the continuance or maintenance of drive and/or motivation to achieve something or reach a goal, and not to give up or stop. Perseverance in this study pertained to sport, education, employment and personal accomplishments. Rating themselves on perseverance was one of the closed questions of the SBIQ. All participants rated themselves on a scale from one to 10, where one was the lowest and 10 the highest score. On average the total group's score was 8.6, indicating how important this attribute was to the group as a whole. Perseverance/persistence was a very dominant theme in the rags to riches stories provided as background to this study, while being driven and self-driven featured among the African/South African stories (see Chapter 4).

Challenge is defined as “the situation of being faced with something that needs great mental or physical effort in order to be done successfully and therefore tests a person's ability; or an invitation to compete” (Challenge, 2018, p. 1). In this study, it was indicated that some of the participants were motivated through a challenge and the will to compete. For instance, Cate missed competing, which she saw as a challenge, and it motivated her to rehabilitate and practice her sport again, while Guy loved competing in his sport for years. M also saw challenge in a positive light, by being prepared to face it and slowly overcome her low point experience. The participants who indicated challenge/competing in their stories presented it as something they were issuing from their side rather than it being issued to them. In other words, they were creating the challenge for themselves, rather than the challenge being set to them; they were competing with themselves. Thus, there is a pro-active approach to challenge and competing rather than a re-active approach towards it. Various studies have indicated that resilience, drive, motivation and perseverance, as in this study, are associated with well-being, meaning, fulfilling potential and/or achievement/success (Grieve et al., 2008; Cherry, 2017; Ciccarelli & White, 2017; Lopez et al., 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Taher, 2015; Wong, 2014).

### **7.7.3 Themes 3: Support (From and to)**

The third main theme for the study was the theme of support, consisting of two elements, namely **support from** and **support to**. The two elements were separate themes in the individual participants' stories, but were collapsed into one theme with the group's stories. Although this theme was not generally presented as a main theme during the stories of the individual participants, it emerged as such when the total group was considered. It is theorised that the theme was latent in



individuals' stories due to the research question asked, which focussed on the individuals and not their support systems and/or others involved with their turning-point experience. As a group, it became clear that in some form or another support from others featured almost always (sometimes in support of other themes and sometimes crucial to moving beyond the low point). Participants' turning-points sometimes started with the support from family members, others/friends, professionals and/or religious people. The theme's importance could therefore not be ignored, and thus emerged as a main theme. Literature showed that support from and support to others can lead to self-fulfilment, having existential meaning, and purpose (Efklides & Moraitou, 2013; Friedman & Schustack, 2012; Grieve et al., 2008; Lyubomirsky et al., 2011; Murdock, 2013; Wong 2014).

The 'support to' element made this theme very interesting. In general, helping others, or prosocial behaviour, holds benefits for one's life (Baron & Branscombe, 2012). Research has indicated that being kind to others enhances life satisfaction and that prosocial spending causes a positive feedback loop to sustain future prosocial spending (Aknin, Dunn, & Norton, 2012; Buchanan & Bardi, 2010). Some more benefits gained by being prosocial (helping others) include feeling good about oneself, therefore experiencing positive emotions and feeling intrinsically rewarded; reduced uncomfortable negative emotions; boosted image of self and reputation; and, when strongly identifying with another, it contributes not only to another's well-being, but also to one's own (Baron & Branscombe, 2012).

A number of the participants indicated they found meaning through supporting others, for example through financial assistance, taking care of others, and/or helping a friend in need. Others were indirectly motivated to reach their high points, in wanting to render support to others. Rating themselves on caring and giving were two of the closed questions of the SBIQ. All participants rated themselves on a scale of one to 10, where one was the lowest and 10 the highest score. On average, the total group's score for caring was 8.5 and for giving, 7.8, indicating how important these attributes were to the group as a whole.

#### **7.7.4 Theme 4: Acting or creating (Doing something)**

The fourth main theme was **acting or creating**, with the sub-element **doing something**. The 'doing something theme' was prominent with all individual participants and was a very wide-ranging theme consisting of various underlying sub-themes. In the total group of participants, this theme emerged as the acting or creating part of their turning-point experiences. All the individual participants presented this theme, although they differed on **what** they were doing. This theme highlights the fact that all participants did at least something (or acted) to move (away) from their

low point(s) in an effort to turn it into or move towards their high point(s) (created change). The mere act of doing something was the basis for this theme.

The acts sometimes meant going step-by-step and moving forward slowly. Acts included searching for a job; continue participating in sport or learning a new sport; exercising; asking and going for professional help; meeting and talking to someone who could be trusted to offer on assistance; praying to God and/or going to church; changing one's thinking and attitude; finishing school (matric); studying for a qualification or receiving further education; achieving smaller goals to assist in moving forward; taking care of others and/or assisting one's family; and leaving one's negative low point environment. Lopez et al. (2015) indicated that sharing one's negative life story with another could lead to better coping and improved QOL/well-being.

#### **7.7.5 Theme 5: Spiritual: Faith, religion (God)**

One of the main purposes of the study was to determine if spiritual aspects (religion/faith in God) played a role in participants' turning-point experiences. It was expected to be present, given the distribution of religious affiliation in South Africa. According to the General Household Survey of 2013 (Statistics South Africa, 2014), 84.2% of the country's citizens are Christian, 2% Muslim, 5% ancestral, tribal or traditional African, 1% Hindu and 0.2% Jewish. Therefore, considering the country's dominant religious affiliation, and the fact that 92.4% of all South African citizens are religious, it was expected that most participants would probably mention God in terms of **religion**, **faith** and spirituality. It appeared that if religion/faith in a deity was mentioned, it referred to God in all cases.

The term **spiritual** is intended to refer to that distinctive part of our nature of being human, where we are being seen as separate from animals, tapping into the dimension of the divine and that which transcends our daily ordinary mundane life (Friedman & Schustack, 2012; Shantall, 2013). This was a main theme, as most of the participants indicated in the SBIQ that they were religious. Most of the participants, namely MJ, Trish, Jack Lime, Hulk, Cate, Gert, Chad, Limna, Kim, Kim2, Razz, Simone and Jack presented this theme in their turning-point experience, and it formed a significant part in their stories of moving beyond their low point(s). Religion/faith in God was manifested by speaking to a believer, praying to God, performing a religious practice, like going to church, confessing to God, asking for forgiveness, understanding and accepting His purpose, finding peace in Him, and moving forward (acting) as a result of having had an religious/spiritual experience. This theme had an additional effect on the meaning participants found, especially when it involved religious/spiritual growth. Although meaning had a strong connection to the spiritual theme in some

cases, it emerged as a separate main theme. Furthermore, religious practice behaviour has been associated with improved psychological and physical health (Ciccarelli & White, 2017; James & Gilliland, 2013).

#### **7.7.5.1 Theme F: Virtues**

This unique theme complements the main spiritual theme. Quite a few participants have indicated certain virtues as being important to them in affecting change in their lives. Various virtues were mentioned, which will be the elements of this theme, namely hope, forgiveness, appreciation, honesty, patience, and humbleness. The term virtues in this study refers to the **positive or good spiritual qualities** an individual possesses, seen as values and/or principles. They are spiritual not necessarily in terms of faith and religion, but as far as they go beyond or transcend the ordinary mundane physical and psychological dimensions of human life. These virtue elements, however, were experienced in a number of cases in connection with participants' religion or faith in God.

**Hope** was earlier defined as “a belief that something you want will happen” (Hope, 2010, p. 724), or a “desire accompanied by expectation of or belief in fulfilment ... expectation of fulfilment or success ... a chance or likelihood for something desired ... something wished for” (Hope, 2017, pp. 4 & 8). In this study hope refers to a desire or want, belief, trust or feeling that contains the elements of anticipation, expectation and/or strong chance or likelihood that something will happen, come to pass, be fulfilled, or realise in future and turn out for the best. For Trish, Razz, Limna, Guy and Kim2, hope was associated with positive emotions (being proud and happy), having meaning, perseverance, remaining positive, being focussed, having confidence, and achieving goals and dreams.

**Forgiveness** was earlier defined as “to grant pardon for or remission of (an offense, debt, etc.) ... to grant pardon to (a person) ... to cease to feel resentment against ... to cancel an indebtedness or liability of ... to pardon an offense or an offender” (Forgiveness, 2017, p. 1). Forgiveness includes the act and willingness to forgive yourself and/or others and entails being freed from negative attachment to a transgressor, which could lead to prosocial behaviour and more compassion towards others. Various participants had to forgive others in order to be able to move beyond their low point(s) and ultimately have meaning in their lives. Forgiveness was generally associated with meaning; it further meant finding peace and relief/release from inner pain, personal burden, drug and alcohol abuse, and improving interpersonal relationships. Forgiveness was sometimes related to religion/faith in God and moving closer to God. For Kim it was an indication of how she felt when she was able to escape her low point circumstances; she would forgive her transgressor everything.

**Appreciation** or gratitude was defined as by Peterson and Seligman (2004) as “[b]eing aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks” (p. 30) and by Lopez et al. (2015) as “[b]eing thankful for and appreciating the actions of another” (p. 324). Appreciation in this study refers to being thankful towards something or someone and appreciative thereof, meaning to be satisfied, happy and pleased with what one has or one’s life. It implies showing gratitude to something or someone. Gert was grateful of his life and the fact that his wife was alive after their accident.

**Honesty** was defined as “truthfulness, sincerity, or frankness; freedom from deceit or fraud” (Honesty, 2017, p. 1). In respect of oneself, it involves authenticity, non-deception and being true to oneself, while in respect of others it means being truthful, open and sincere within a relationship towards others (Thorkildsen & Hanus, 2009). In this study, honesty with one self as well as others were included. It refers to being open, frank, sincere, truthful and authentic. Appreciation in this study was found to be associated with devotion and dedication, along with being positive, having meaning through personal growth, renewing of interpersonal relationships, and being thankful to God.

**Patience** can be defined as “the bearing of provocation, annoyance, misfortune, or pain, without complaint, loss of temper, irritation, or the like ... an ability or willingness to suppress restlessness or annoyance when confronted with delay ... steady perseverance; even-tempered care; diligence” (Patience, 2017, p. 1). In this study, it referred to the ability to postpone immediate gratification, to positively tolerate and endure difficulties, while patiently waiting for something to happen or the outcome to become visible. Patience in the study was mostly associated with perseverance, especially for Trish, who persevered through patience and slowly but surely was able to reach her high point.

**Humbleness** as earlier defined by Emmons (2017) involves a “clear and accurate (not underestimated) sense of one’s abilities and achievements ... the ability to acknowledge one’s mistakes ... and limitations ... keeping one’s abilities and accomplishments in perspective ... an ability to ‘forget the self’ (p. 13) and by being “courteously respectful” (Humbleness, 2017, p. 1). Being humble or humbleness in this study, refers to the state of being free of pride and arrogance, being modest, at a lower rank or position, and thinking you’re not too important (Humble, 2017; Humility, 2017) It did not refer to being insignificant, subservient or inferior, either regarding oneself or in comparison with others (Humble, 2017; Turnbull, 2010). In humbleness, Kim2 endured her experience of being homeless after a previous high point experience and by not

thinking she was better than others. Through faith in God and support from others, she was able to bounce back from her low point and reach a new high point.

Various studies have indicated that hope, forgiveness, appreciation, honesty, patience, and humbleness were associated with improved well-being, happiness and/or life-satisfaction and contributed to living a better life (Albers et al., 2010; Chaudhary et al., 2014; Emmons, 2017; Emmons & McNamara, 2006; Foy et al., 2011; Krägeloh et al., 2015; Land et al., 2012; Lewis, 2011; Lopez et al., 2015; Lyubomirsky et al., 2011; O'Connell & Skevington, 2010; Seligman, 2002; Troy & Mauss, 2011).

#### **7.7.6 Theme 6: Meaning (Personal and spiritual growth, achievement, fulfilment, wisdom, value)**

The last main theme, **meaning**, was a very prominent and dominant theme in the study, which originally consisted of many various different elements within the individual participants' stories. All participants presented this theme. The reason why this theme is so dominant is that it was closely connected to the participants' high point(s). All participants qualified for the study in terms of experiencing a significant high point after a low point, and therefore had achieved something different (a change) or positive, in contrast to their past negative low point experience(s). Meaning in this study included having a positive outlook; **wisdom**; **value**; financial independence; support to and sharing one's story with others; achievements; qualifications; success; fulfilment of dream/goals; dealing and coping with past negativities; **personal** and/or **religious/spiritual growth**; having found happiness; purpose in life and fulfilment.

Nevertheless, as a precursor to participants reaching their high points, they experienced or found some form of meaning as part of their turning-point experience. This theme would indicate that a person have moved out of the low point and was starting to move into her/his high point. Thus, it would point towards a deeper meaningful QOL experience linked to well-being, as opposed to just having achieved or accomplished something concrete, which would imply mere hedonic pleasure and satisfaction. In line with the eudaimonic view on well-being, this theme involves QOL, life satisfaction, meaning, purpose, engagement, relationships, beliefs, fulfilment and/or reaching one's full potential (Austin et al., 2013, Cooper & Leiter, 2017; Dodge et al., 2012, Vázquez et al., 2009).

The study concluded that this theme was somehow a pre-requisite to or served as a clear indication of when at least one of the participants' high points was reached; as well as an indication of the end of a/the low point(s). In other words, when a participant has found significant meaning in her or his

experience in relation to the journey between the low and the high point, it indicated that the person's short life destiny was reached. An ultimately successful handling of, coping with, cancelling out, or renewing of the low point experience, was then described as having found significant meaning within the experience of moving beyond a previous significant low point towards a significant high point. The meaning found by participants in this study in the form of reaching points of **fulfilment**, success, **achievement** and purpose, correlates with other studies on finding meaning (Austin et al., 2013; Cooper & Leiter, 2017; Dodge et al., 2012; Leontiev, 2015; Seligman, 2002).

### 7.8 A summary of discussions emanating from the theme-model approach

Through integrative analysis of information, the current study revealed some very interesting findings. Thirteen of the nineteen participants indicated 'preparation for the low point situations' as a theme, which might have had an effect on their turning-point experiences. However, this fell outside the scope of this study and was therefore not investigated. All participants had **intense** low point experiences, each uniquely different in intensity, nevertheless, significant. The low point experience was seen as the starting point or emanating basis for the turning-point experience. It was suggested that many of the turning-point experiences **originated within** the low point experience(s).

It can be concluded that all participants had significant high point experiences; at the very least, all participants indicated that they had significantly moved out of their low point(s). The high point experiences were considered to be more **fluid** than originally expected. Some participants were still in the process of reaching it – perhaps, because of setting very high standards for it, or seeing a high point as an ultimate point, or seeing it as a continuous experience which cannot be viewed/reached as a single point-in-time. The one main theme, that was present and prominent in all participants' experiences, was **meaning**. This theme was closely linked to the high point experience(s). Although there were cases where the participants were apprehensive of having reached a definite identifiable high point, all of them confessed to have found some form of meaning in their lives. In this study, finding meaning became an indication or proof of a significant move out of a low point and beginning to move into a significant high point. Meaning was considered one the most interesting themes in this study. It can be concluded that a success story does not just depend on the eventual achievement, but also on having found meaning.

It would ultimately be clear from this study that at least one positive attribute had to be present in the participants' lives to be able to overcome their negative low point experience(s). One of the

strongest positive attributes that emerged was **positive attitude**. Positive attitude in this study consisted of a more or less permanent inclination or tendency to be positive in thinking about circumstances, which would sometimes be accompanied with positive self-talk, and result in a determination to be positive and act positive towards a positive future/dream, goal or achievement/position (a high point). Positive attitude amongst participants was often linked to having positive dreams, aspirations, hope, appreciation, patience, perseverance, being future/goal-orientated, applying humour, being happy-go-lucky, as well as being positive in religion/faith in God. Positive attitude is therefore linked to finding meaning, as was evident from the all participants' stories, and finding meaning is in turn linked with the humanistic/existential psychology concept of spiritual self-transcendence.

This study strongly suggested that most of the participants had experienced **intra-personal processes** stemming from the low point experience(s), which contributed to their turning-point experiences. Furthermore, they all have **done something** (in a positive way and mostly through stepping away from the low point and towards a future high point) that generally held positive meaning for the participant. What was very interesting, although not presented by all participants, was the theme of **support to**. This theme presented itself as an emerging theme, indicating that some participants were able to have a turning-point experience due to the will to help others, caring for others or affect change in the lives of others. It was also linked to gaining a form of meaning in their own lives.

What stood out in the rags to riches stories of this study was that, although present in most of the participants' stories, the **support from** theme was not so dominant. One might have expected this theme to be stronger for an individual to be able to overcome her/his own low point, but it seemed to be in the background. Nevertheless, its importance was not denied or ignored. One reason why it did not feature so strongly, could be that the question asked to participants focussed on the participant as a person and did not ask specifically about the role of others in the turning-point experience. It may indeed be so that people moving from rags to riches, are individually responsible for affecting change in their own lives. In this study, the **support from** theme did not include **religion/faith in God**, but formed a separate theme, although the religious theme could be regarded as support from the Deity/God and/or religion (being able to move from a low to a high through religious/faith, support from others, religious practises and institutions). In this study, it was concluded that prayer by others, forgiving others, attending church and sharing one's beliefs/spiritual experiences with others, could be regarded as part of the 'support from' theme, rendering more prominence to it.

In integrating the individual participants' themes in terms of positive psychology theory (especially in terms of its concern with studying positive emotions) a very interesting theme element regarding dealing with or **control over negative emotions** emerged. As can be expected, a negative low point will be accompanied by negative emotions. This was visible in each participant's intense experiences of their low points. However, the individual stories did not consistently deliver the dominant theme of controlling or managing negative emotions. It was in combining participants' stories, that this theme emerged and through re-analysis that it formed part of the theme **positive emotions** as one of the elements. The study's group of participants therefore revealed that the effective management or (at least partially) dealing with or controlling over negative emotions formed an important part in having (more) positive emotions to assist in turning one's low point into a high point. This study, however, did not confirm this element to be a main theme, but as it was shown in previous studies to be significantly important, it had to be considered, at least partially, as an element of the theme **positive emotions**. It was especially evident in Hazel and Kim's stories where they were still experiencing negative emotions, but in spite of not having overwhelming positive emotions, they still managed to find meaning in their experiences. In this study, it was shown that managing one's negative emotions was not always a pre-requisite to having a positive high point experience, but is appeared to be an important aspect to consider. This is supported by the hedonistic viewpoint (which is associated with positive feelings of happiness) and by looking at QOL subjectively as living a happy life. Although there were individual indications of QOL being associated with positive feelings (happiness and content), this study leaned stronger towards revealing participants' QOL experience as living a meaningful life (subjective appraisal thereof), and a life characterised by success and achievements (objective appraisal thereof).

Through the integration of individual stories, the study revealed that people with rags to riches stories (in comparison to people just having success through natural progression in life) might be distinguished in as far as they had certain aspects present in their lives. These included, as a start, becoming mindful of internal processes taking place to elicit the cultivation of definitively strong positive attributes (such as positive attitude). Then, presenting the will and efforts in dealing with negative emotions (to bring more positive emotions to the fore); followed by doing something in an attempt to move away from one's negative experience (positively in the direction of one's improved (or higher) positive experience); and then finally, finding meaning in one's life experiences. In support of this, being religious and having faith in God would be especially characteristic of this South African group of participants. The ability of human beings to transcend on spiritual level would become evident from this study.



## 7.9 Contextualising the theme-model for the participants of the study

The research study was conducted among nineteen South African citizens from various cultural groups. In consideration of the themes, it seemed that participants identified quite strongly with the individualistic culture, which focuses on the individual independent of the group they belong to. There were quite a few themes presented by participants that indicated individual intra-personal experiences involving the individual her/himself, such as **minding oneself/introspection, identity, independence** and **specific positive attributes about oneself**. On the other hand, the themes that suggested a strong identification with the collectivistic culture, meaning to focus on the group rather than the individual, were the **support from and to** themes. In the study, the support were mostly provided by people that came from similar groups to which participants belonged, such as family members, fellow sports-/religious persons, friends and/or members (professionals) from the gatekeeper organisation. Support from and/or to others were in the form of sharing personal information, receiving/giving advice, being assisted/giving assistance to finish school or receive education, being employed, receiving professional help, and having one's physical or spiritual needs met. Trust and care were values shared within these groups. As far as the main dominant theme of meaning was concerned, it seemed that participants identified with either types of culture. Meaning regarding the individual's personal growth as well as meaning relating to being involved with others were found among the participants.

Information obtained from the SBIQ in terms of how participants viewed themselves on certain specified aspects, yielded interesting contextual information. Eighteen of the participants indicated they were, at the time of the interview, happy while only one was very happy. Four of the participants were generally very religious, thirteen religious, and two neutral about religion. Personal status was very important to eight participants, important to two participants, while nine participants were neutral about its importance. Although happiness was indicated to be prominent, as indicated by responses to the study's SBIQ measure, it was not indicated to be prominent in analysing the presented participants' themes. Therefore, the importance of happiness was not disregarded, but in respect of the themes presented through the qualitative measure, ultimately, meaning was found to be more prominent than happiness in this study.

When viewing the participants' stories post low and high points, one could be tempted to describe them in a similar way than known rags to riches stories, such as tending to highlight them in terms of an objective viewpoint and/or in concrete terms. For instance, one could describe a person who became disabled, who then overcame the disability with training and became a national team athlete, competing internationally at the Paralympics, achieving medals and breaking records. Or a

person who was very poor as a child (sometimes without food and proper clothes) and dependent on others to survive, who managed to finish matric, obtain a job and a tertiary qualification to finally become so independent that she was able to afford a house and financially take care of others.

From this viewpoint, it would be acceptable to say that the study's 'everyday' participants each had her/his own rags to riches story to tell. However, from the phenomenological approach and positive psychological theory viewpoints, the study indicated more than just this. The meaning of participants' experiences and the positive aspects applied in overcoming the past negative low point and obtaining the high point thereafter were also pointed out and described in more detail.

Individual participants' stories were unique and the study indicated that a combination of themes was used in each person's life to overcome their low points. The theme-model provides a representation of emerged themes obtained from the total group of study participants to suggest that themes can be combined in various ways to assist a person in overcoming her/his low points. The theme-model, based on the themes from participants in this study, can assist others in similar situations by applying combinations of these themes to their own lives in order to create their own destiny or high point.

#### **7.10 Limitations of the study**

According to Glesne (2011), standardization and definite criteria are sometimes lacking in qualitative research due to its openness. This approach is therefore usually more complex and less structured or standardised than the quantitative research approach. The current researcher strived to have a few critical aspects of the study standardized, especially pertaining to the research question, the RoL drawing as additional source, and the first round of analysis as part of the methodology. These attempts included asking the same research question to each participant and showing the same RoL drawing example (i.e. the researcher's own RoL drawing). In addition, transcripts were analysed individually and independently of the other participants' stories in the sequence of how interviews took place (during the first round of analysis). Comparison of the stories with each other would only take place later on. The limitation, however, is that the current study cannot be regarded as a standardised study in terms of the methodology used. The way the phenomenon was measured was purely from the subjective point of a few participants who had experienced the phenomenon. The research question was an open-ended question, participants were conveniently recruited, measuring instruments were not standardised, and the analysis was interpretive and subjective. Most indicators of QOL follow objective measurements, but the current study only focussed on the subjective part thereof.

Qualitative research is further criticised for not always offering certainty to the researcher; it is claimed that there is always the possibility that other or alternative interpretations of a study's findings may be made (Willig, 2001). The current researcher did not use other researchers, or investigator triangulation, to evaluate and/or validate the findings and interpretations. However, the researcher used various other methods of triangulation to strengthen the validity of the current study. Various methods of data collection were employed, such as individual interviews, RoL drawings, SBIQ, researcher notes and background stories. These methods were employed to allow the current researcher to verify and validate the understanding of the participants' experiences and allow him to correctly interpret the data (Wagner et al., 2012). The background stories to contextualise the participants' stories posed a limitation to the study. As previously indicated, not many formal studies on the phenomenon studied in this research study exist, although many rags to riches stories can be found in popular media. Although, the background stories used came from the printed and published media, care was taken to provide as much information from these stories as possible concerning the psychological and spiritual aspects involved to reach the high points. Reasons and motivations provided by the subjects of these stories were included as far as possible. In the end, this study could contribute to present the formally investigated aspects to contextualise other future studies.

With regards to transferability of conclusions to another context, the researcher had to consider the fact that participants were from a South African community, from different backgrounds, race and ethnic groups, gender and ages, thereby in a way consisting of various 'smaller' cultures. Validity could be a concern in cross-cultural research (Wagner et al., 2012). To the current researcher, the study did not constitute a cross-cultural study, as it required the participants to be South African citizens, therefore the total group was regarded as 'one' South African culture. This can be seen as a limitation to the study that can be addressed through further studies, wherein the difference in cultures regarding the phenomenon under investigation, could be studied. The current study was limited in applying its findings to other similar contexts or testing if its designed theme-model would work, although limited comparisons with background rags to riches stories did take place.

It was indicated that the intense experience of the low points in this study would appear to be an important theme to consider as background context to understanding the themes: in a way, it was regarded as a pre-requisite to the turning-point experiences. However, as one of the potential limitations of the study, this theme was not investigated in detail, as the focus of the study was not on the low points, but on the turning-point experiences provided from the perspective of the participants. The significance or importance of the theme 'preparation for low point experience'

was not taken into consideration for this study and therefore participants were not asked to present more detail in this regard. They were also not compared to each other to see if significant differences existed for those presenting the theme compared to those who did not. This could be a potential limitation as this phenomenon could have had an effect on the low point experiences and the ability to move beyond it towards their high point(s). A further limitation is that the perspective of participants concerning their low points from their high point experience point-of-view was not investigated in detail. However, it was parsimoniously addressed through their meanings described.

Traditionally, in the field of positive psychology, happiness is considered as an important part of well-being. In this study, it did not present itself as a dominant theme. One would have expected it to be more important, at least as motivational factor for obtaining meaning and purpose after moving from a low to a high. One could investigate this aspect purposefully in a follow-up study, but this finding made the current study very interesting, as it seemed that meaning took precedence over happiness.

#### **7.11 Future directions for research**

Firstly, it is suggested that the intense experiences of the low points and the effect thereof on the turning-point experiences of participants be investigated in detail as a future research study. Furthermore, the effect of the background of ‘being prepared for the low point experience’ on the turning-point experience (and/or even the high point experience) could be investigated. The perspective of participants in viewing their low point experiences from the high point experience point-of-view could be considered for investigation in a future study.

As support from or to others was an important main theme of this study, it could be further investigated in detail in terms of its specific importance within turning-point experiences. Also, it could be suggested that the specific role of religion/faith in God in terms of prevalence and importance in an individual’s life relating to the her/his turning-point experience could also be investigated further. Dealing with negative emotions was an emerged theme highlighted in this study. Investigating this further could be advantageous to the fields of counselling and therapeutic psychology, especially when positive emotions (and happiness) are included. Passion (such as for sport) in the current study was considered as an element of positive emotions in relation to how it pertained to the turning-point experience of participants. Its role in being driven, motivated and/or having a positive attitude and how this contributed further in overcoming negativities could be a topic for further investigation as well.

It was indicated that this study focussed on internal influences that could affect change in a person's life towards fulfilment and improved QOL experience. Focussing on the external influences (such as environment and background) could be a topic for another study. The current study posed a theme-model that can be further investigated as a tool to employ in one's life to assist one in overcoming negative situations. Lastly, other indicators of well-being, like health, culture, personal status, income and money, did not feature so strongly in this study, but could reveal interesting results if investigated further.

### **7.12 A subjective QOL study**

QOL pertaining to this study entailed the subjective appraisal or experience of a person (meaning how the individual perceives her/his own life) in terms of her/his high point experience after a negative low point experience. The researcher would consider the participant regarding her/his life as being **a good meaningful life**, meaning to be in a better subjective state than before, as having achieved more than before, or obtained more personal/spiritual meaning and growth compared to a previous time (during the low point). The study focussed on investigating and exploring the deeper internal influences within a person, rather than the external influences (such as environment and background) that could affect change in participants' lives and leading to more fulfilling lives and ultimately an improved QOL experience.

Some interesting comments were made by participants in response to what they understood QOL to be (in the SBIQ). Their responses were providing additional contextual information in understanding participants' viewpoints and the themes they presented. Participants in general understood QOL to be something one possesses (standard of living, attributes and status), a viewpoint on life, something one does and also something, which involves others. QOL as something one possesses includes the following: a high standard of living in terms of health, finances, job/career, education, and family; positive attributes (attitude, perseverance, self-esteem, self-worth, self-respect, personal strength, decisions-making skills, being oneself, having daily dreams and goals) and personal status (being personal happy, financially independent, healthy, successful, possessing high morals and values, and having meaning or purpose). QOL as a viewpoint on life involves viewing life as good; seeing QOL as a measurement of what makes one happy and what is best for oneself, and being happy about oneself and/or one's life. QOL as something one does, means valuing life positively, living one's life to the fullest/to one's fullest potential, enjoying it, living it in a better way, learning something in life, and making the best of every situation. Lastly, QOL also involves others: sharing your story with them, helping them, and being an example to them (See Appendix ZX for detail responses). Scoring their QOL on a scale

from one (lowest) to 10 (highest), the average score for the whole group was 7.9. This served as an indication that the group as a whole considered QOL quite important in their lives. Most QOL indicators are objective in nature, but this study indicates that participants tend to view QOL as something very subjective (Eurostat Statistics Explained, 2013a; Palepu et al., 2012). Thus, the study would recommend QOL to include more subjective indicators than presently exist.

This study could additionally be seen as a QOL study investigating the concept of spirituality. As indicated, spirituality in this study consisted of two dimensions, namely existential spirituality (which in this study mostly pertained to finding/having meaning, obtaining self-growth, but in general, transcending oneself) and religious spirituality (in this study mostly pertaining to obtaining growth in religion/faith in God). The spiritual dimension of being human has been revealed in this study by participants' search for and finding deeper personal meaning, reaching a higher purpose, connecting or engaging with something or someone else (the divine or God) on a deeper/closer level and/or moving beyond or transcending one's own negative life experience to reach a higher more positive/improved life experience. In this study, it was shown that meaning not only encompasses the psychological dimension of being human, but also extends to the spiritual and religious dimensions (Emmons cited in Leontiev, 2015). This study would then further recommend inclusion of more indicators of a spiritual nature into the current QOL research indicators, as participants in this study indicated that both religious and existential spirituality had significant meaning to them, which affected their own QOL experiences (moving from a negative low point to a positive high point).

### **7.13 Implications and contributions of the study**

One of the first implications of this study was to highlight the intricacies involved when a person moves from a low to a high point in her/his life. In contrast to the researcher's initial expectation that the turning-point experience could be linearly (or one-dimensionally) described, it was found that the participants' experience of the turning-point was more complex and mostly dynamic. As pointed out, the participants each had unique experiences with some having more than one low/high points. Many relevant features associated with a turning-point were discovered.

A strong contribution made by this study is the rich descriptions of participants' stories providing information regarding their remarkable lives of overcoming strong negative situations and thereafter experiencing meaning in their lives as ordinary people. This finding provides hope to others who search for a meaningful existence especially when they find themselves in dire situations.

The current study contributes a theme-model to the body of existing knowledge as a summarised representation of a group of people's turning-point experiences, which could be applied to similar people in similar situations, as a guideline to action. It is suggested that the theme-model poses possibility to a person having a low point experience similar to those of the study's participants as a means of potentially creating a high point experience. The themes highlighted in the model can serve as aspects to consider applying to one's own (similar) negative life experience to affect change to or at least alleviate one's own intense experience of one's own low point.

The study's also poses suggestions to the field of positive psychology to re-define or re-consider its identified strengths and/or virtues as presented in Peterson and Seligman's (2004) *Character Strengths and Virtues* (CSV) handbook. Participants presented themes in this study such as minding oneself, identity, self-thought/self-talk, future-orientated, positive emotions, support (from/to), drive, faith, patience, personal/spiritual growth, and value which could be classified as good character and stable strengths and/or virtues a person has/should have to live a gratified and meaningful life.

Lastly, the study poses possible answers to fundamental QOL questions concerning what a person can do to improve her/his overall QOL or how a change from a past low QOL position can be affected to reach a higher QOL position. This study especially contributes towards describing and understanding individuals' subjective QOL experiences.

#### **7.14 Conclusion**

According to Willig (2001), the value of qualitative research lies in being able to "study meanings", "tap into the perspectives and interpretations of participants", allowing the research to generate "genuinely novel insights and new understandings" and to be sensitive "to diverse forms of expression" (p. 150). The current researcher is certain that he was able to accomplish this by focusing on understanding the subjective experiences of participants from their story-telling point of view and in their 'own words' were able to determine what aspects were employed by them in moving from a significant low point to a significant high point.

Finally, it can be concluded that certain (dominant) psychological and/or spiritual aspects had to be present in participants' lives to enable them to move from a low point experience to a high point experience. The theme-model offered main themes as representations of these aspects, along with certain unique themes obtained from this study. The theme-model could function as an example to others who might find themselves in similar circumstances of moving from a low point situation/experience to a high point situation/experience. It was understood that, although intensely

experienced at first, an individual's negative experience of a part of her/his life can change and afterwards have positive meaning, by the application or utilisation of certain aspects, as suggested by this study. The destinies of all participants in this study were positive high points after negative low points, which they were able to 'create' in their own lives, willingly and through their own efforts. Through the application of the suggested aspects contained in the theme-model, one could therefore create (or change) one's own destiny to move beyond a low point experience towards a high point experience.



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## APPENDIX A

### FORM A: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Dear Participant,

My name is Daniel Knobel, a PhD (Doctorate) degree student from Unisa (at the College of Human Science, Psychology Department). I am conducting a **Quality of Life (QOL) research study** as part of the requirements for obtaining the said degree.

The research I am conducting is specifically aimed at describing and exploring the experience of participants who have had a “**significant low quality of life experience**” (at least once before in their lifetime) and who **thereafter** (and within **reasonable relation** to that low quality of life experience) had a “**significant high quality of life experience**”. In addition, the **aspects** which caused/helped the person to **move from the low to the high point** are to be described and explored further.

In other words to clarify: I am interested in gathering information from people who have had a low quality of life experience (and elaborate on their experience thereof), but who thereafter found themselves at a high quality of life experience (and again to elaborate on their experience in retrospect thereafter), along with what they as individuals, for example, **thought, felt, said, did** and/or **believed** to move past the low to the high point. The quality of life experience could have impacted in a person’s life for example in the following areas: financially, employment and or work status, health, emotional state, walk of faith, performance and/or achievement, or personal and general circumstances.

Thank you for permitting me to interview you about aspects of your personal life. It is dearly appreciated. I would like to assure you that the data obtained and information gathered from you will be handled with utmost confidentiality with one of its main purposes being to ensure that your personal identity is protected. This information will be primarily used in obtaining my Doctorate degree (therefore for study purposes). Consequently, by assigning you a “**pseudonym**” (should you prefer so) we can ensure that your identity remains intact and confidential and eliminate any possible harm to you.

Answers to the questions posed to you will be recorded (via voice recorder) and documented (via transcription), but will only be linked to you via your preferred name/pseudonym. It may be necessary to publish some of the findings resulting from this study; again, your pseudonym could be used. Original information will be stored in a safe place, and **protected** from the public (to be destroyed after 5 years). Only parts of direct speech will be quoted, again ensuring as far as possible that your words are not associated with your identity or “public” name (where applicable).

Participant no:

Name/Pseudonym:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX B**

### **FORM B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

#### **Background: Assessing psychological/emotional and spiritual/religious aspects present to move from a low quality of life (QOL) experience to a high quality of life experience**

My name is Daniël Knobel, a PhD (Doctorate) degree student in Research Psychology at the University of South Africa (Unisa), and I am conducting a study on quality of life (QOL) experienced within the South African context. Specifically, I am interested in investigating which psychological/emotional and spiritual/religious factors (if any) are present when an individual aims to uplift/be uplifted or improve/have her/his experience of QOL improved. The main aim of the research study is to describe and explore further the aspects that were present or necessary in order for a person to have changed and moved beyond a low QOL experience to a high QOL experience. I would appreciate your participation in this study, as it will assist me in understanding human experiences better and help to contribute to the world of academic knowledge. Your participation and responses are therefore of utmost importance to me!

#### **Research procedures and safeguards**

Firstly, I would require a few hours of your time. A few meetings would have to be scheduled by us to obtain the research data from you. During our first meeting, introductions to the study will take place, where after a River of Life picture will be drawn by you, indicating certain aspects of your life's experience(s). Furthermore, during the same or at a subsequent meeting, an interview will be held with you to obtain data (via voice recording and/or in writing) which would then lead to further exploration afterwards (through data analysis). The drawing of the picture will take not more than approximately 15-30 minutes. The initial interview will take not more than approximately 45-90 minutes. The picture and recorded responses will be kept confidential at all times. Anonymity and protection of your personal identity will be ensured by using a pseudonym. After initial analysis of information, it may become necessary to conduct a follow-up meeting (taking not more than approximately an additional 60-90 minutes) to obtain more information. It is foreseen that, at best, no more than 2-3 sessions would be ultimately conducted per participant.

Your name and signature provided through this consent form ensure that ethical/legal procedures are followed by me, therefore ensuring your protection. Your personal details (if you prefer so) will not be included with or attached to the information obtained from the picture and interview questions. It is anticipated that you will not be facing any significant adverse risk by attending and/or providing information at the required data collection sessions. The only foreseeable possible

risk involved is the revealing of personal information to a limited extent and expression of personal opinion. The handling of such information obtained would be strictly confidential with the understanding that in no way would it be possible to connect published findings to personal identity or name (if so preferred). Only I, the researcher who is directly involved in this study, would have access to the information that could reveal your personal identity. The aim of the study is not to expose specific individuals but to present information to the knowledge community (such as the psychology department of the University of South Africa and the broader community through possible future publications based on the study) in order to make a contribution to the development of psychology and human knowledge. The picture and audio recording obtained from the interview sessions will be made (with your consent, verbally and in writing through signing of this document) and kept safely for 5 years until it may be destroyed. Again, strict confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Information obtained will be further processed via coding and analysis (by utilising hand and computation procedures) to ensure the best research results.

Initial documentation based on this research study will firstly be presented in the form of a doctoral thesis, but it may also be necessary to present findings to others (such as to the academic and broader community) in the forms of, for instance, publications in scientific journals or presentations at scientific conferences. When this happens, your personal identity particulars will still remain un-associated with any of the data collected and remain to be treated as confidential. To ensure that the process of data collection is as smooth and non-threatening to you as an individual as far as possible, it is recommended that you as participant should respond as honestly as possible. Your contribution will be helping me to collect evidence in identifying possible aspects present in creating a better QOL experience in a person's life! This evidence could potentially be used to assist others in improving their own QOL experience, which might include indicators of QOL such as financial, employment and/or work status, health, emotional state, walk of faith, performance and/or achievement, or personal and/or general circumstances.

### **Enquiries**

Once the study is complete, I, **Daniël Knobel**, would gladly make results available to you, should you require so. For any enquiries, feel free to contact me at: **Address: 50 Murray Street, Nelspruit, 1200, Tel: 013-7553918/0845218712 or E-mail: danielpknobel@gmail.com**

Or my supervisor, **Prof Ilse Ferns**, at: **Address: Department of Psychology, PO Box 392, Unisa, Pretoria, 0003, Tel: 012-4298210/0828226415 or E-mail: fernsi@Unisa.ac.za**

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM

*This form has been developed for your protection. Please read the following information with regard to your participation in this study. After you have read it through, please sign and submit the form indicating your willingness to participate. Thank you!*

- I understand that I am being asked to participate in a Quality of Life research study conducted by Daniel Knobel, a doctorate student at Unisa. If I need to, I can contact his supervisor, Prof Ilse Ferns, from Unisa, College of Human Sciences, Psychology Department, at any time during the study.
- The study aims to investigate the psychological/emotional and spiritual/religious factors present when an individual moves from a significant low to a significant high point in her/his life experience.
- I realize my participation in this research study is completely voluntary, and I may withdraw from it at any time and for any reason without penalty (should I choose to). There would be no consequences of withdrawing from the study. Should I withdraw or be withdrawn from the study, any information obtained from me will be destroyed and not used with regards to the study.
- I am aware that data will be recorded (in drawing, script and via voice recording) and give my permission thereto. I am aware that recorded data will be kept confidential through measures to be undertaken by the researcher. No identifying data will be included when interview data is transcribed. I realize that some of the study's findings may be published, but still my personal identity would be protected.
- Permission to publish personalised River of Life drawings will be obtained from me first, before doing so by the researcher.
- There are no known risks associated with the study. If any unforeseen negativity directly related and/or resultant from this study is experienced, the researcher will assist me in gaining access to professional help should it be required.
- I realize that my participation could assist others and/or contribute to the community of knowledge regarding human quality of life experiences.
- I am at least 18 years old.

## CONSENT

**An explanation of this study has been provided to me. I understand it, know my participation is voluntary and therefore agree to participate in this study.**

---

**Name: Participant (Printed)**

**Date**

---

**Signature: Participant**

*\*This research study has been approved by the University of South Africa's Review Board by acceptance of a research proposal in order to submit a PhD degree research thesis.*

**Participant No:**



## APPENDIX C

### FORM C: INTRODUCTION TO RIVER OF LIFE DRAWING

Let's imagine that a person's life, with its experiences, is compared to a river, which I am calling a person's "**River of Life**". In and along this river there are various kinds of substances to sustain life (such as nutrients, sources of food and shelter as well as the force to generate electricity power), but also perhaps it contains various kinds of obstacles or challenges to life (such as rocks, dry-beds, driftwood, bridges, etc.). Now, imagine your life is a continuous river flowing from one end (*birth*) to another (*passing away*). On this river (between the two ends) your life **has** happened (*past*), **is** happening (*present*) and **will be** happening (*future*). On at least one occasion you have experienced in the past an important (or *significant to you*) low point. But, you have managed to experience an important (again, *significant to you*) high point thereafter!

Drawing of a River of Life picture:

Please draw your own River of Life with at least these **two points** on it, indicate next to them, what it was (**described in your own/any words**) and your **age** and **dates** coupled to them.

*(Be imaginative and elaborative as far as possible - You could indicate more than one low/high points as this is your River of Life!)*



Your response to drawing a River of Life picture will be kept **confidential** and (if preferred) only be linked to you via your pseudonym. Your original picture will be stored in a safe place, and protected from public, and be destroyed after 5 years. It might be necessary to publish some of the findings resulting from this study (such as River of Life pictures), but only with the participant's **permission**, and by using the preferred name/pseudonym. I would like to assure you that original data and information will only be used in such a way and as far as possible to ensure that it is not associated with your identity or "public" name (where applicable).

Participant no:

Name/Pseudonym:

## APPENDIX D

### FORM D: INTRODUCTION TO THE INTERVIEW AND SHORT BACKGROUND INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Participant,

My name is Daniël Knobel, a PhD (Doctorate) degree student from Unisa (at the College of Human Science, Psychology Department). I am conducting a **Quality of Life (QOL) research study** as part of the requirements for obtaining the said degree. The research I am conducting is specifically aimed at describing and exploring the experience of participants who have had a “**significant low quality of life experience**” (at least once before in their lifetime) and who **thereafter** (and within **reasonable relation** to that low quality of life experience) had a “**significant high quality of life experience**”. In addition, the **aspects** which caused/helped the person to **move from the low to the high point** are to be described and explored further.

In other words to clarify: I am interested in gathering information from people who have had a low quality of life experience (and elaborate on their experience thereof), but who thereafter found themselves at a high quality of life experience (and again to elaborate on their experience in retrospect thereafter), along with what they as individuals, for example, **thought, felt, said, did** and/or **believed** to move past the low to the high point. The quality of life experience could have impacted in a person’s life for example in the following areas: financially, employment and or work status, health, emotional state, walk of faith, performance and/or achievement, or personal and general circumstances.

Thank you for permitting me to interview you about aspects of your personal life. It is dearly appreciated. I would like to assure you that the data obtained and information gathered from you will be handled with utmost confidentiality with one of its main purposes being to ensure that your personal identity is protected. This information will be primarily used in obtaining my Doctorate degree (therefore for study purposes). Consequently, by assigning you a “**pseudonym**” (should you prefer so) we can ensure that your identity remains intact and confidential and eliminate any possible harm to you.

Answers to the questions posed to you will be recorded (via voice recorder) and documented (via transcription), but will only be linked to you via your preferred name/pseudonym. It may be necessary to publish some of the findings resulting from this study; again, your pseudonym could be used. Original information will be stored in a safe place, and **protected** from the public (to be destroyed after 5 years). Only parts of direct speech will be quoted, again ensuring as far as possible that your words are not associated with your identity or “public” name (where applicable).

Participant no:

Name/Pseudonym:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*(In order to qualify as a participant you need to have had the experience of a “low” point in your life, a “high” point in your life and thoughts, feelings, sayings, actions, and/or beliefs employed to move from the low to the high point).*

To start....

A. Open question to be asked during the interview:

In your own (any) words, can you please describe your significant (noteworthy/important) “**low point in life**”, along with the significant “**high point in life**” experienced and the aspects that you **thought, felt, said, did** and/or **believed** to move **from or past the low to the high point**?

*(Suggesting at least 30-60 minutes talk).*

B. Possible questions/statements to be used as guidance during the interview:

1. You can start by describing that important **low point** experienced as indicated in your River of Life drawing (you can use any words you choose). *(Suggesting at least 10-15 minutes talk).*
2. Describe the important **high point** experienced **after** that low point described here before. *(Suggesting at least 10-15 minutes talk).*
3. The low and high points can be **anything experienced** in your life and which you consider important or noteworthy *(For example: financial, employment and/or work status, health, emotional state, walk of faith, performance and/or achievement, or personal and/or general circumstances).*
4. Think if the **time** when you have **overcome or moved past** the low point – describe that time. *(Suggesting at least 10-15 minutes talk).*
5. Think of the **aspects** *(thoughts, feelings, sayings, actions, and/or beliefs)* that you are able to describe to me, that you used or that were there to make you move from/past the low point to the high point. *(Suggesting at least 10-15 minutes talk).*
6. Be as descriptive and elaborate as possible, you can use any words you like...

Take a 5-10 minute break, before..... In conclusion *(after interview)*...

### SHORT BACKGROUND INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE (SBIQ)

Would you be so kind as to answer a couple of background questions for me?

C. *Closed questions to be asked during the interview:*

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ years old. What is your race? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your current job/appointment? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How would you currently rate yourself in terms of happiness? (*Mark with an X*)

Very happy	Happy	Neutral	Unhappy	Very unhappy

4. How would you rate yourself in terms of religiousness? (*Mark with an X*)

Very religious	Religious	Neutral	Not religious at all

5. How would you rate the importance of personal status to yourself? (*Mark with an X*)

Very important	Important	Neutral	Fairly unimportant	Not important at all

6. Please indicate on a scale from 1 ("lowest") and 10 ("highest") how you rate yourself on the following (*Please mark each block either 1/2/3/4/5/6/7/8/9 or 10; if not applicable: 0*):

Perseverance	Caring	Giving	Positive attitude	General QOL

7. Please describe (*in your own/any words*) what you understand "quality of life" (QOL) to mean? (*Suggesting at least 2-5 minutes talk or 5-10 sentences*).

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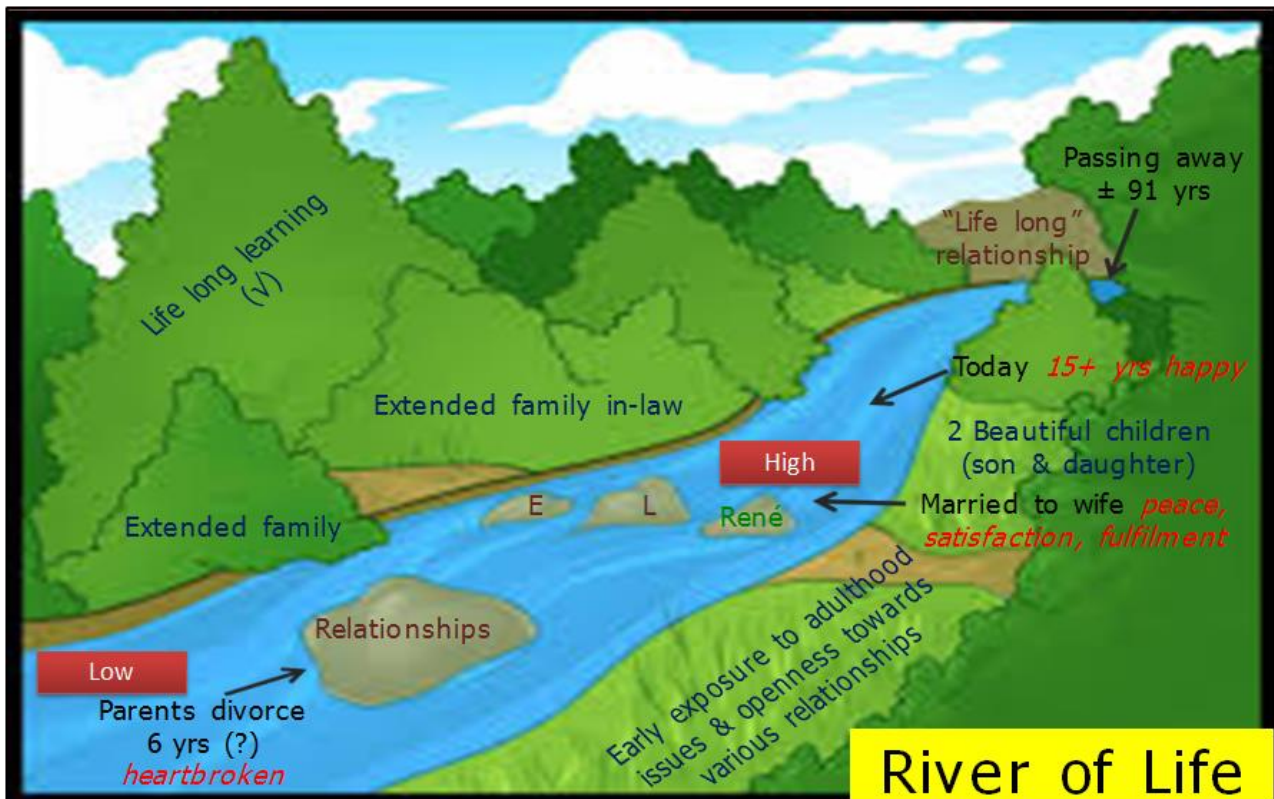
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*Thank you again for your participation – I appreciate it very much!!*

## APPENDIX E

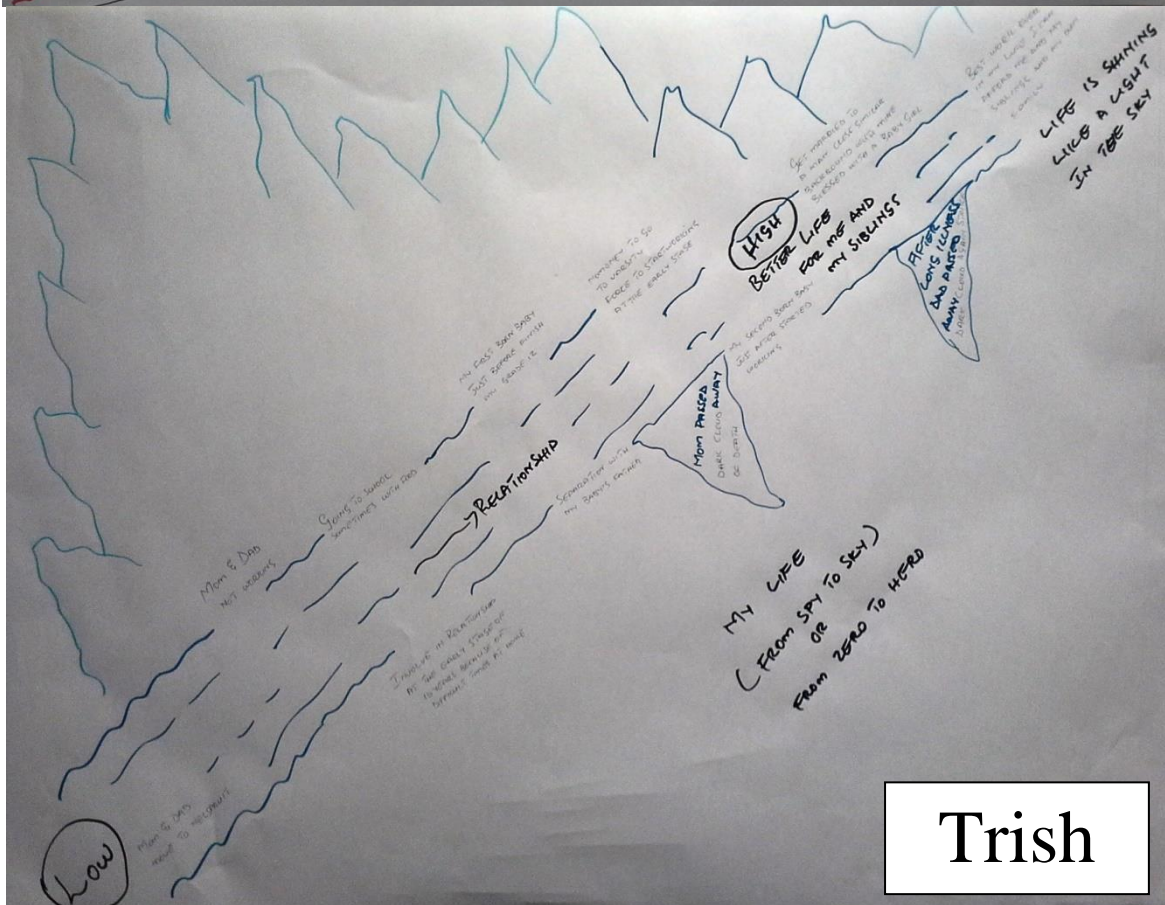
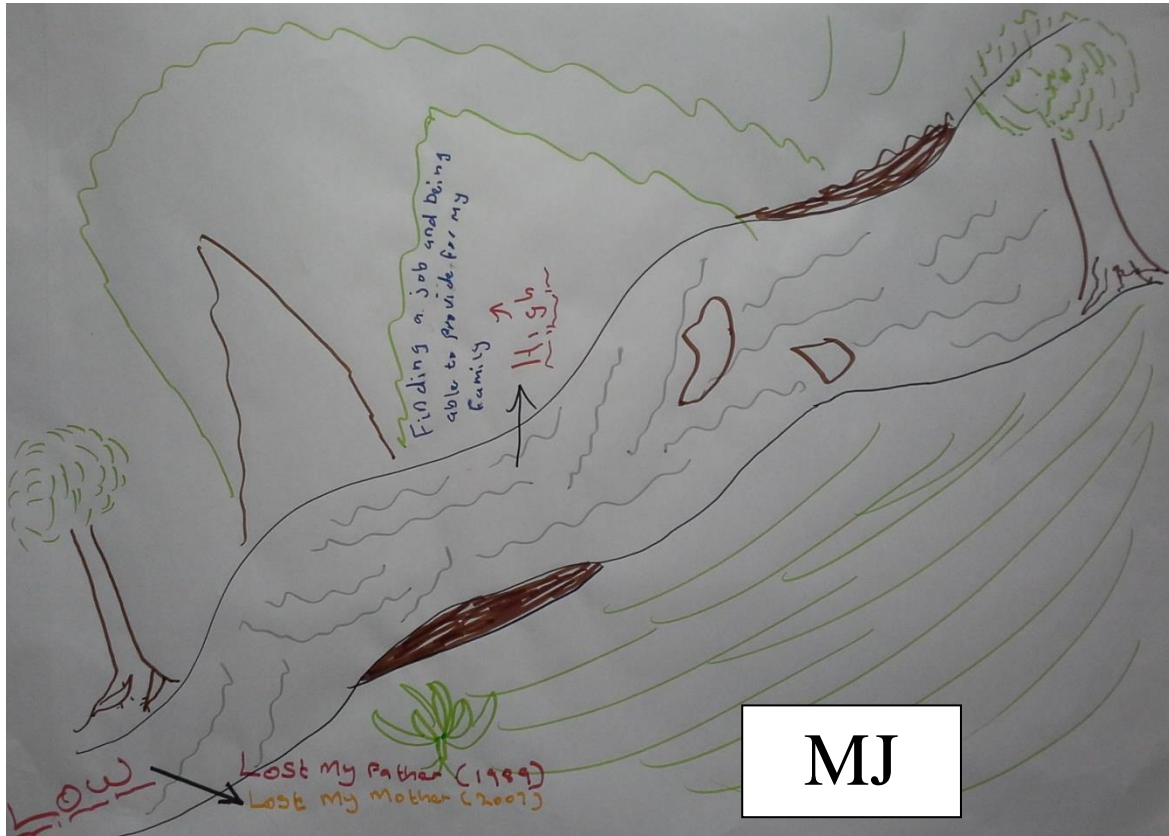
### RESEARCHER'S OWN RIVER OF LIFE (ROL) PICTURE





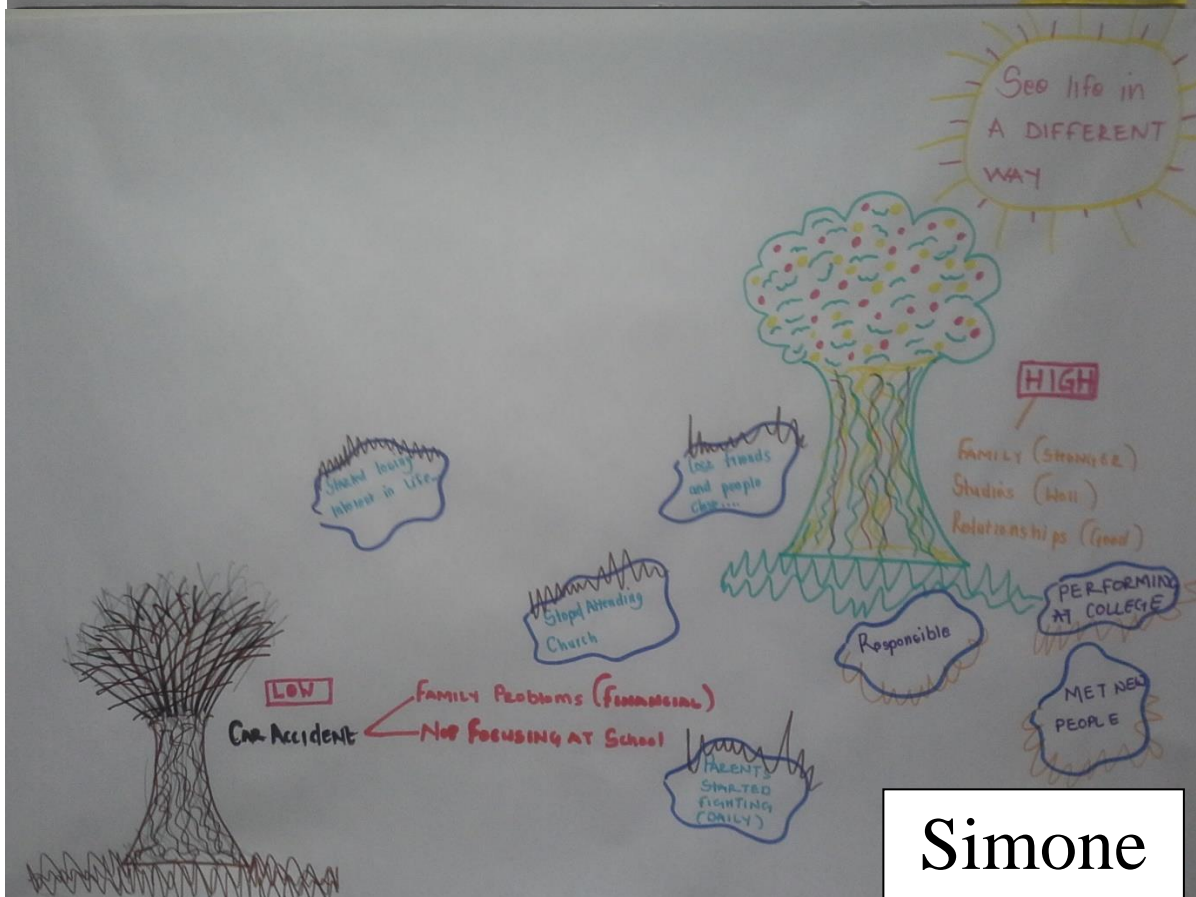
## APPENDIX F

### PARTICIPANTS' RIVER OF LIFE (ROL) DRAWINGS





Razz

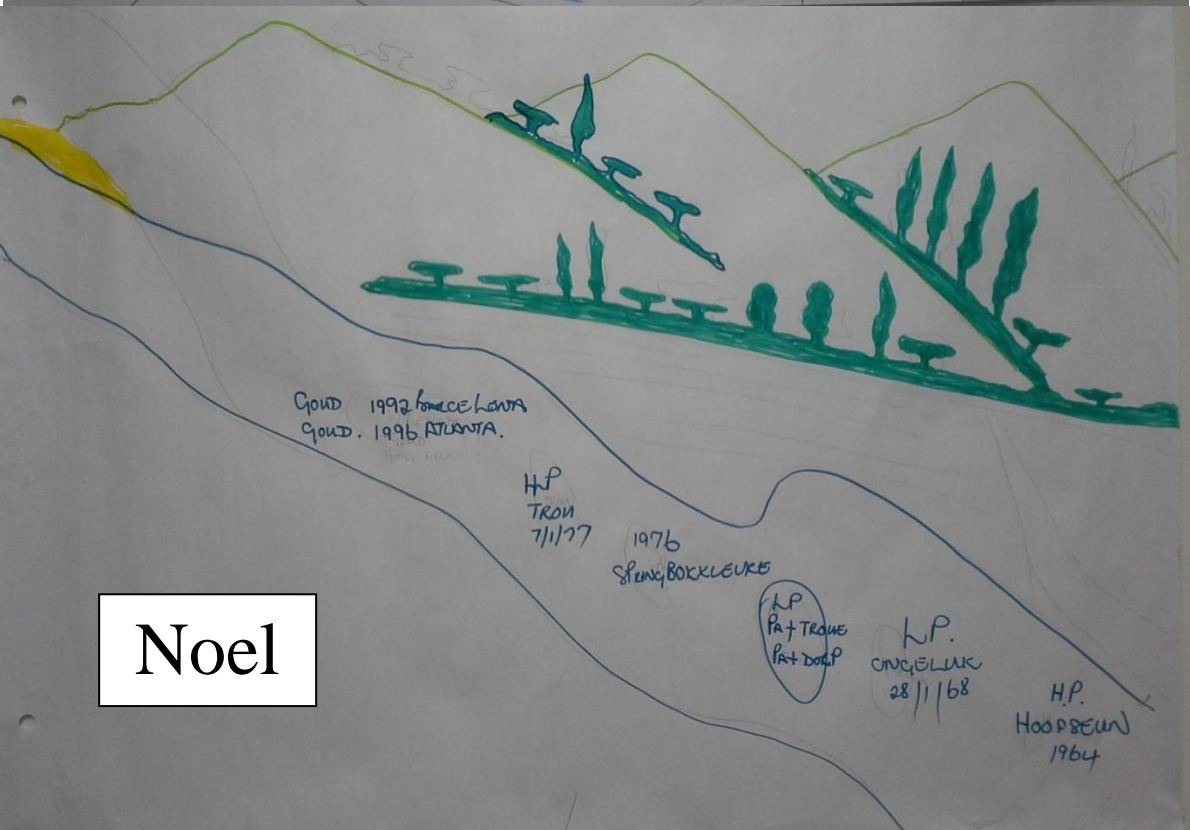


Simone



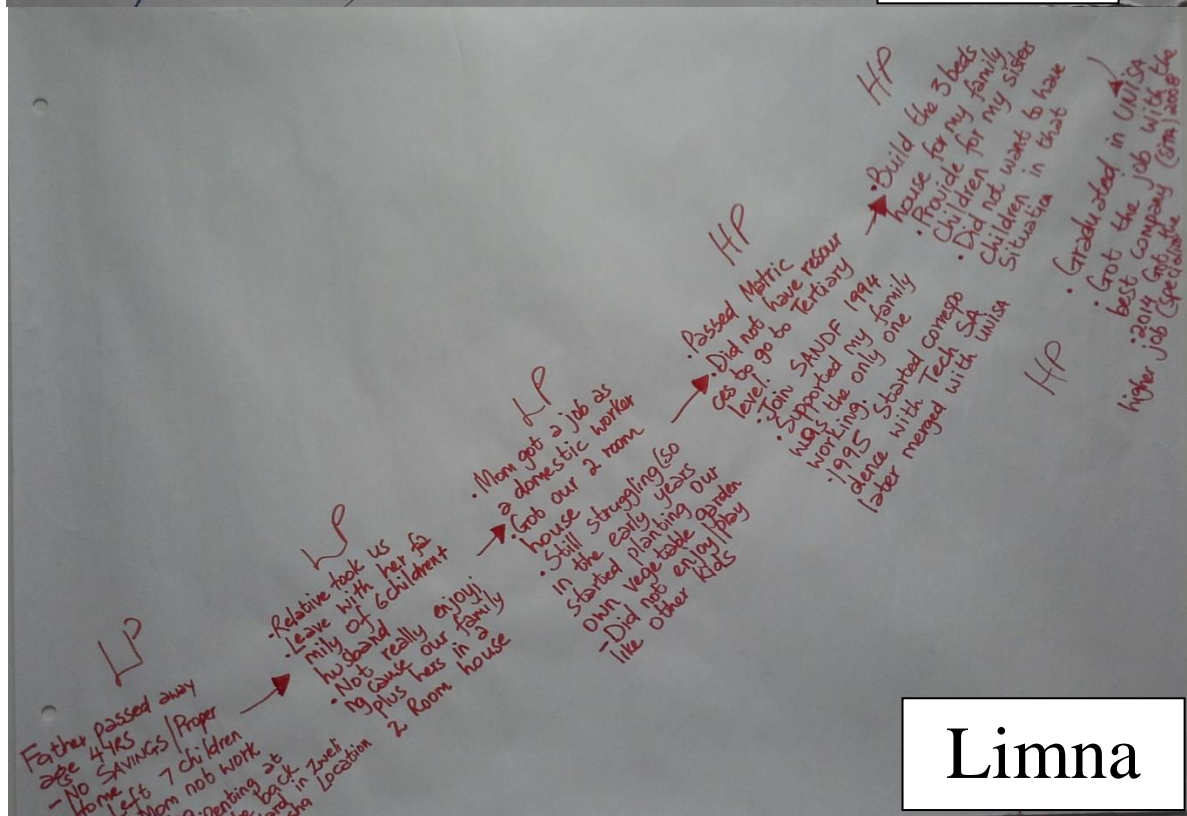


Hazel

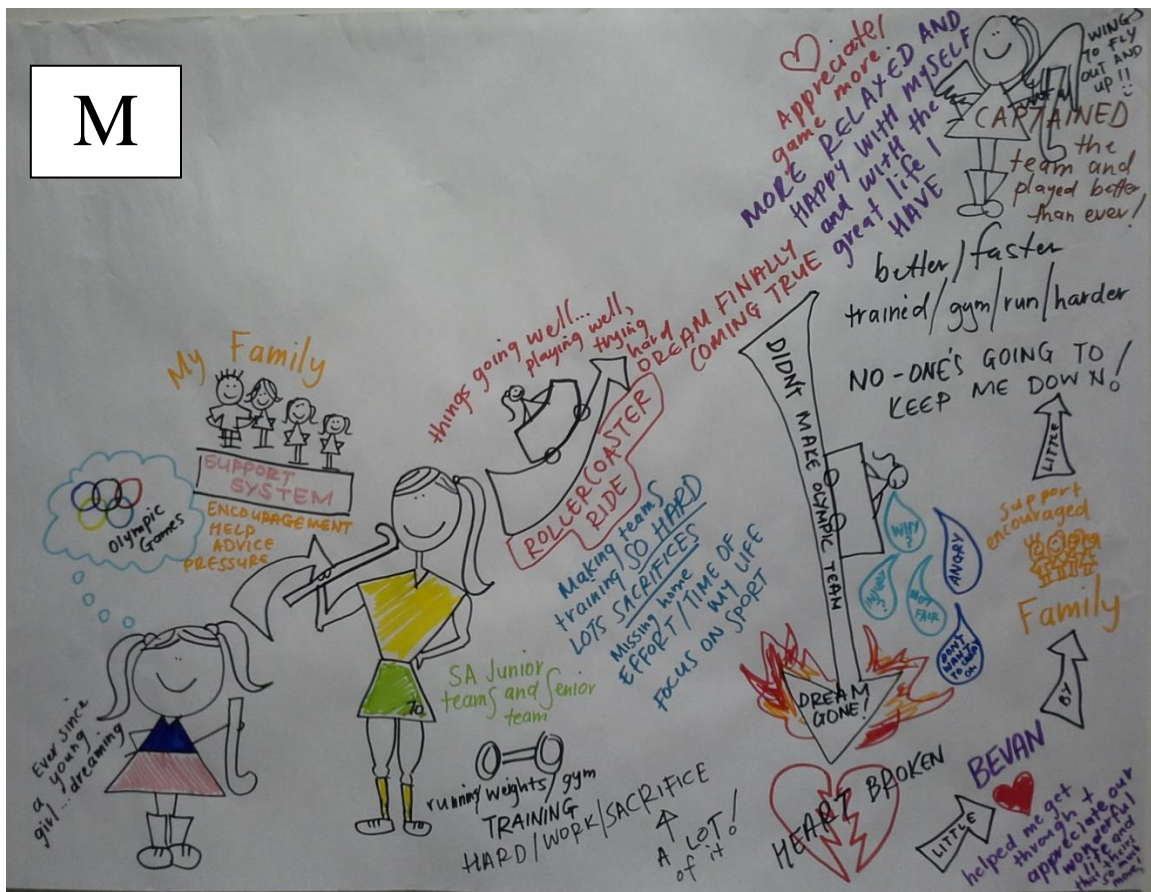


Noel

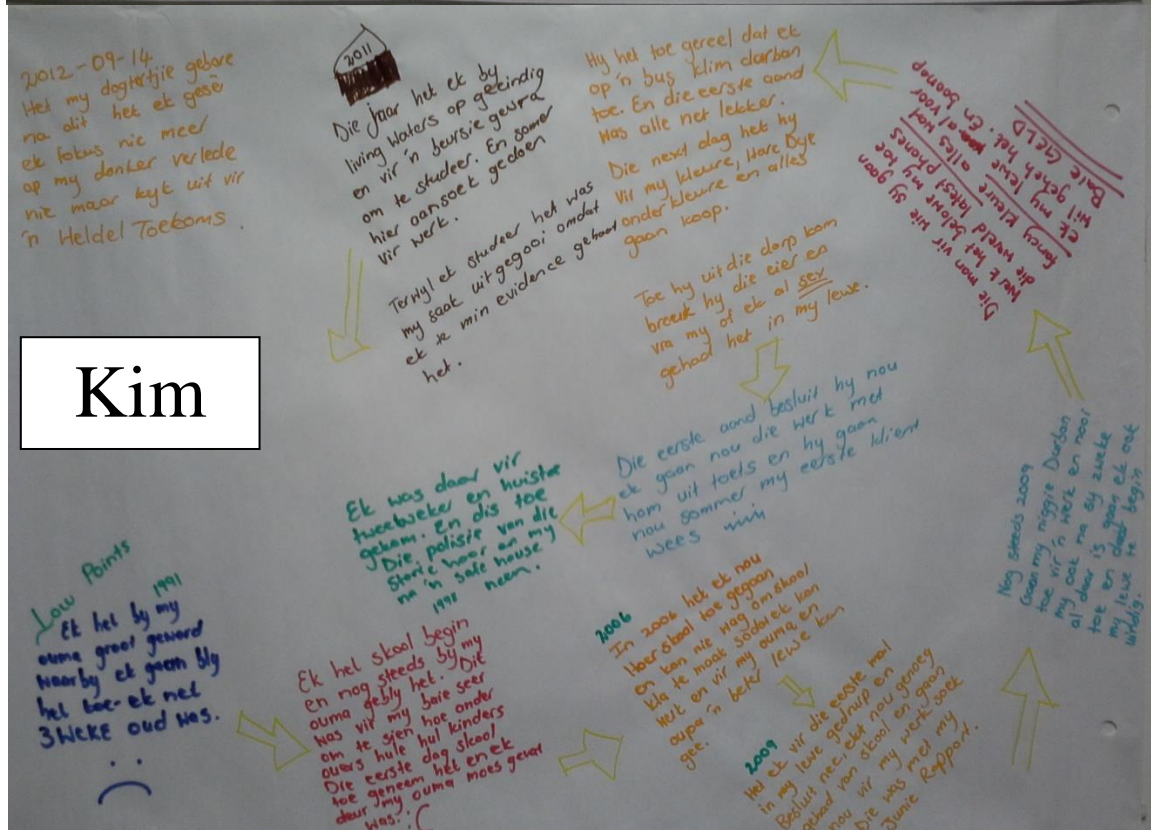




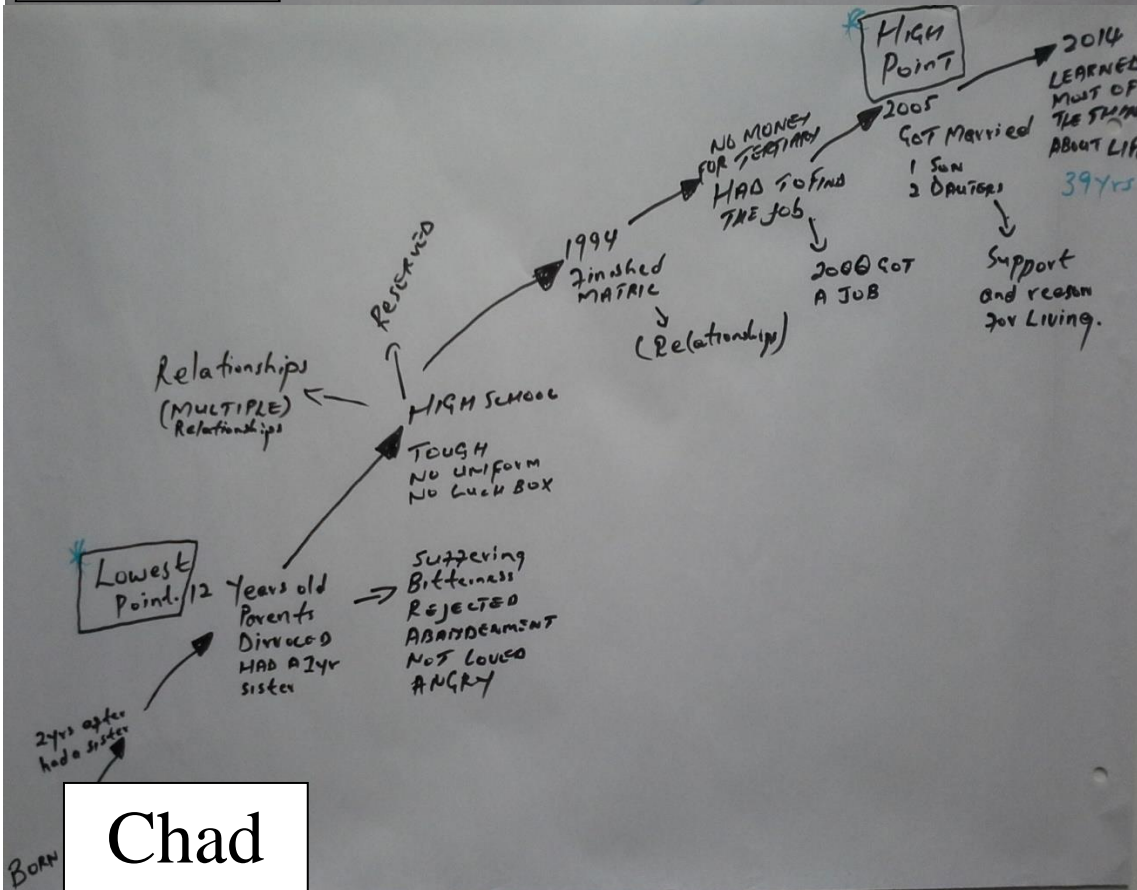
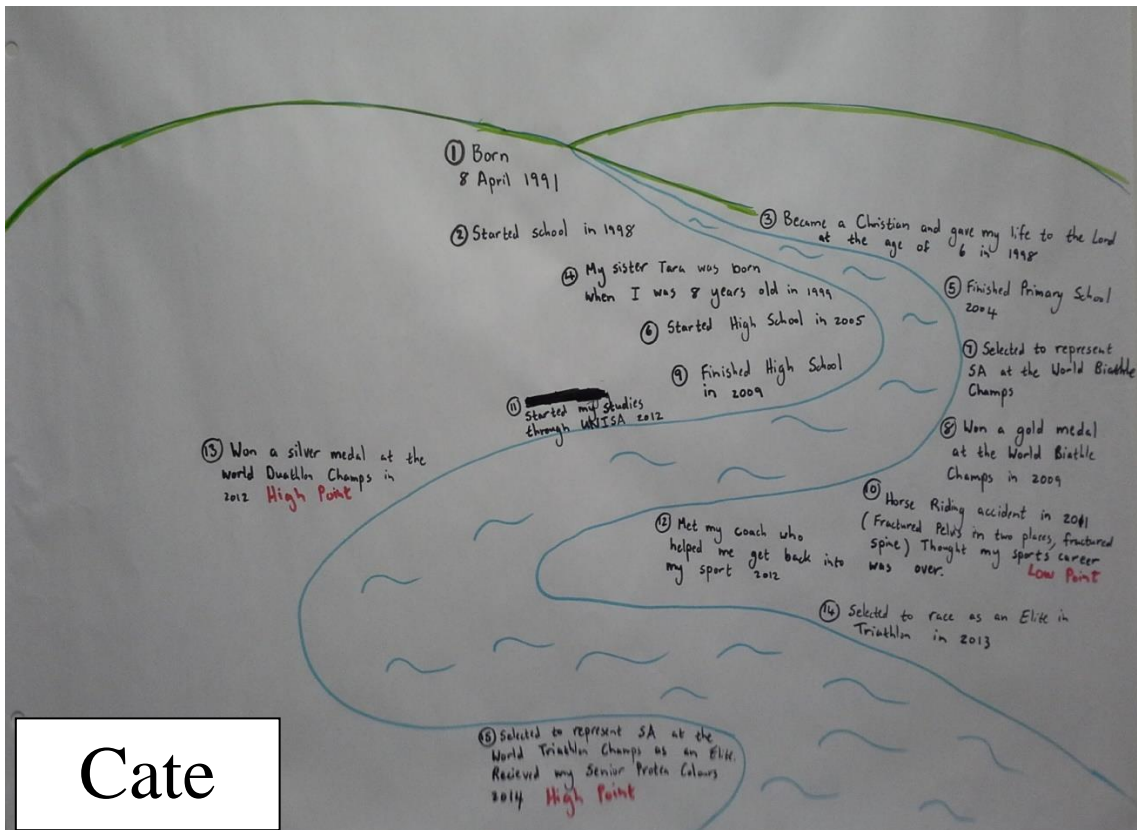
M



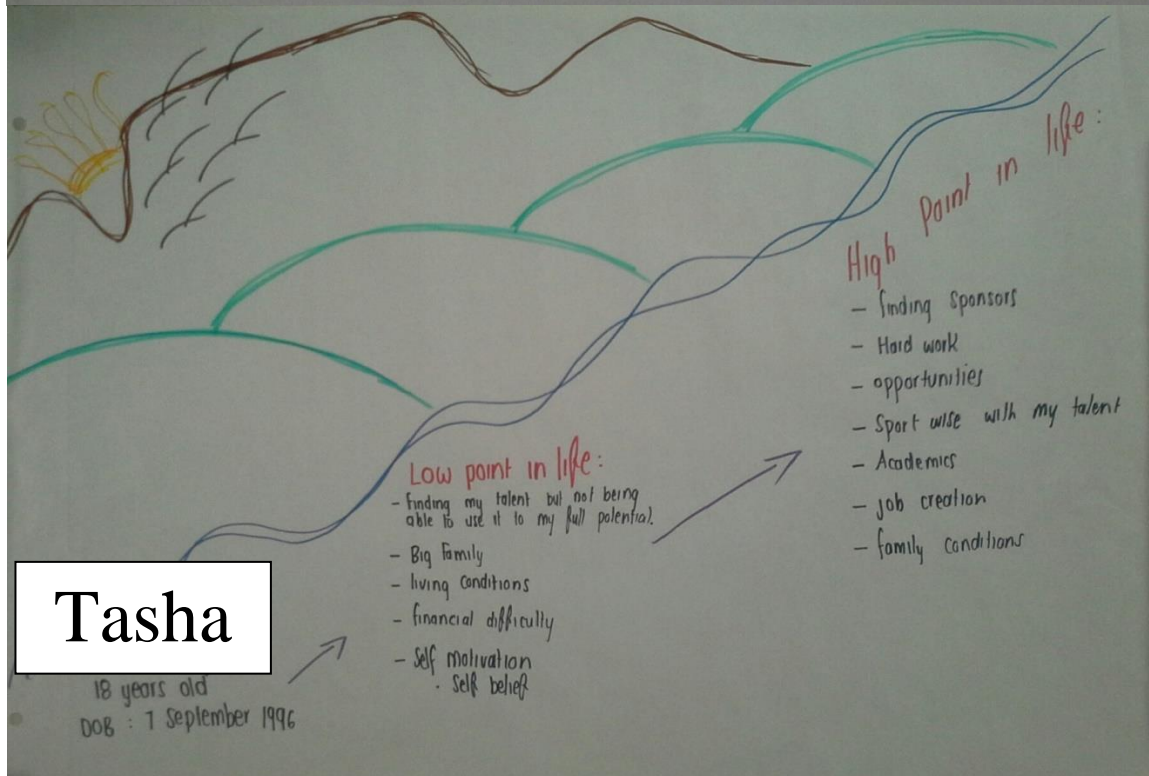
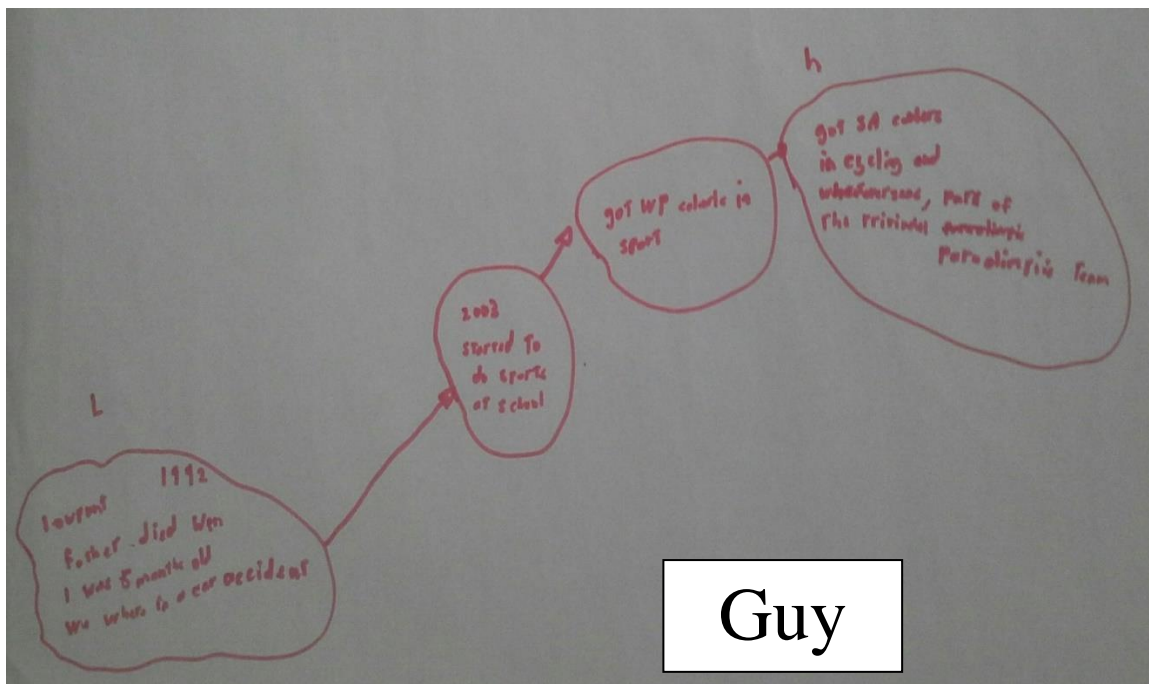
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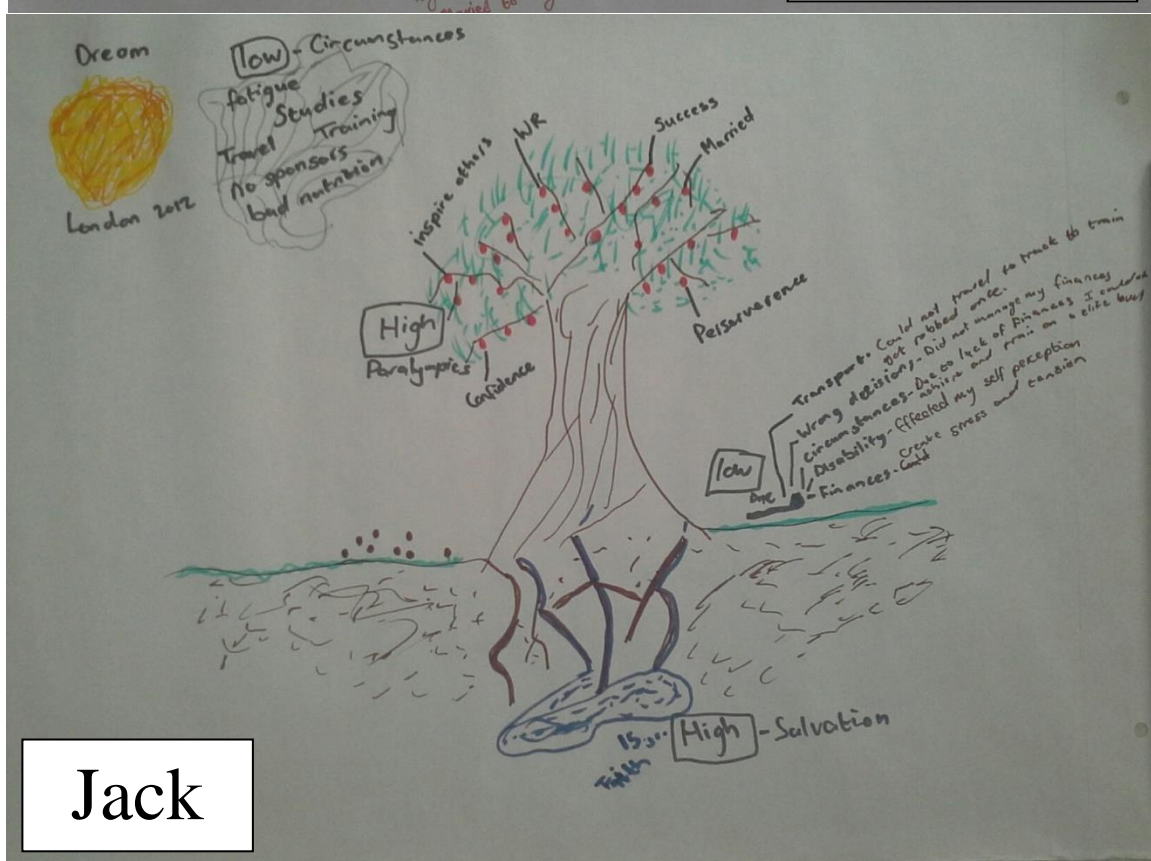








Antie Boy



Jack

Note: Some participants used their real names, but in the end all participants were allocated a pseudonym. RoL drawings are in the sequence of how interviews were conducted.

## **APPENDIX G**

### **THEMES SUMMARY: INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS**

#### **Participant 1: MJ**

1. Awareness (of vulnerable state; feeling sadness/anger), introspection (comparing negatives of self with positives of others, decision-making), self-think (positive, attitude)
2. Control over emotions (anger)
3. Support from (mother, brother, others, society/job)
4. Doing something (speak out, attend class, pass matric, searching and finding a job, working, studying/qualification/education, keeping busy, 'step by step', goal-orientated, taking responsibility, helping others)
5. Support to (mother, brothers, aunt, other family members, society)
6. Faith/religious belief (God)
7. Forgiveness ('letting go')
8. Meaning (helping mother, brothers, aunt, others, sharing story with others, life wisdom, lesson learned)

#### **Participant 2: Trish**

1. Self-realisation, self-think (positive attitude), positive self-talk
2. Perseverance and patience
3. Goal-orientated (schooling, education, responsibility, taking care of children/others, work)
4. Support from (others/community)
5. Doing something (to change circumstances, 'slowly but sure[ly]', sharing story with another/others)
6. Faith/religious belief (God)
7. Hope
8. Meaning ('zero to hero', being able to find a job, becoming independent, wisdom)

#### **Participant 3: Razz**

1. Introspection (honest to himself), self-realisation ('good at sports'), self-realisation (clarity, appreciation, love), self-think (positive attitude)
2. Support from (professional/others)

3. Doing something (new/away from low point, goal-orientated, sport achievement)
4. Support to (others)
5. Faith/religious belief (God)
6. Hope
7. Gratitude
8. Meaning (helping others, positive future, attitude, purpose)

**Participant 4: Simone**

1. Self-realisation (away from suicidal thoughts – ‘life’), self-think (positive), positive attitude
2. Support from (others)
3. Doing something (away from low point/s, taking responsibility, moving forward – away from the low point, experiencing some high points on the way)
4. Support to (parents, brother)
5. Faith/religious belief (God)
6. Meaning (positive outlook, ‘see life in a different way’, future orientated)

**Participant 5: Hazel**

1. Self-think (honesty to self and hope/wishes)
2. Perseverance
3. Support from (help from friend, talking to someone, trusting another person, others)
4. Doing something (away from low point/s, moving forward – away from the low point, experiencing some high points on the way)
5. Meaning (achievement, success in spite of difficult circumstances, future orientated, sharing, helping others, studying further after school)

**Participant 6: Noel**

1. Positive outlook/attitude
2. Perseverance (will-power)
3. Happy-go-lucky, humour
4. Support from (family, professionals, friends, others)
5. Doing something (away from low point, disengagement to negative impact of low point – ‘matter-of-fact/part-of-life’, goal-orientated)
6. Meaning (self-preservation, light-heartedness, happiness, cope with difficulties)



**Participant 7: Hulk**

1. Positive attitude (future, goal-orientated)
2. Support from (sister, family relationship, professional help, friends, social relationships)
3. Doing something (moving away from low point, dealing with problem, looking for help from others or professional help, finding a job)
4. Faith/religious belief in God
5. Meaning (renewed outlook on life, coping with hurt, positive future close relationship)

**Participant 8: Limna**

1. Comparing self to others, realisation (seeing the positive in the negative), self-think (positive), positive self-talk
2. Determination/drive
3. Support from (mother, sister, brother)
4. Doing something (away from the low point, poverty, job, goal orientated, study, education, taking responsibility, support to others)
5. Support to (others)
6. Faith/religious belief in God
7. Hope/expectation
8. Meaning (to others and self, comfort, happiness)

**Participant 9: M**

1. Acceptance (dealing with low point), realisation (taking responsibility), realisation (finding balance, passionate about sport, love for it, finding the positive in the negative), introspection, self-think/self-talk (analysing – positive outcome)
2. Passion (love for sport), fun and happiness
3. Perseverance, challenge
4. Humour
5. Gratitude
6. Support from (background, family, husband, friends, others)
7. Doing something (away from low point, making a decision, work, train hard, grab opportunities), slowly-but-surely/step-by-step (motivated by small achievements)
8. Dream-driven/orientated
9. Meaning (life lesson/importance of sport, fulfilment, realisation, personal growth and worth, overcoming disappointment)

**Participant 10: Kim**

1. Honesty (to self), self-think (positive), personal strength (positive self-talk)
2. Will to be out of circumstances/low point (survival/perseverance)
3. Support from (family, others, boyfriend, professional)
4. Doing something about it (not going along with the 'bad' of the circumstances, low point, unacceptance, not accepting it in total, a step in the opposite direction of the low, in a direction of the high, pleading, pretending), small achievements/high points (motherhood, education)
5. Faith/religious beliefs (praying)
6. Forgiveness
7. Meaning (truth from her grandmother, positive in the negative, achievement, wisdom)

**Participant 11: Cate**

1. Realisation (self-discovery), acceptance (moving on), self-think (positive outlook, believe in yourself, own abilities, coaching)
2. Passion (love for sport)
3. Competitiveness
4. Drive/motivation (escape, releasing tension, competing, goal-setting)
5. Humour
6. Support from (coach, friends, others)
7. Doing something (away from the low point, studying, rehabilitation, working and training hard, persistence, focus, setting goals even small, getting fit, do what you love, overcoming negatives with positives, goal/dream orientated, small steps, achievements)
8. Faith/religious beliefs, beliefs, going to church, prayer (God)
9. Appreciation
10. Meaning (self-discovery, personal growth, appreciation, renewed outlook, handling setbacks)

**Participant 12: Chad**

1. Realisation (insight, dealing with the past, others with similar problem), self-talk (positive), being honest
2. Looking for love (need to be loved, give love)
3. Motivation (doing something different from parents, pushing himself, fighting spirit), dream/goal/future orientated

4. Support from (father, wife, professional, family, others)
5. Doing something (education, looking for a job, looking for professional help, going to church, finding love, taking responsibility, taking action, dealing with the past, dealing with the pain, sharing with others within a significant relationship)
6. Support to (helping another)
7. Faith/belief/religion (God)
8. Forgiveness (writing a letter and giving/presenting it in person)
9. Meaning (renewed outlook on life, personal growth, coping with the low point, being loved and supported)

**Participant 13: Gert**

1. Acceptance (moving on/dealing with low point), positive attitude (during and after the trauma), self-think (negative to positive), honesty and openness
2. Choice/decision-making (having to make a difficult decision)
3. Support from (professional, others, wife, children)
4. Doing something (taking responsibility, promise, persist to support wife, follow career path)
5. Support to (wife)
6. Faith/religious belief (God)
7. Appreciation/thankfulness
8. Meaning (promise, unselfishness, commitment, support wife, persistence: to support wife and follow career path)

**Participant 14: Jack Lime**

1. Acceptance (finding peace), realisation (faith and learning something), positive attitude/thoughts (turning negative into positive), self-think
2. Goal-orientated/driven
3. Support from (family)
4. Doing something (continue playing sport, continuing in what he loves doing, working hard)
5. Faith/religious belief (God)
6. Meaning (within, from the low point experience, overcoming, hope, general, value)

**Participant 15: Guy**

1. Acceptance (moving forward), positive attitude (strong mind set)
2. Decision-making (focusing on one sport), focus
3. Goal-setting/orientated
4. Passion (for what he does, sport)
5. Support from (mother, professional, special needs education, others)
6. Doing something (sport, working hard, training, dedication)
7. Faith/religious belief (prayer)
8. Meaning (positive strong mind set, dedication, maturity)

**Participant 16: Tasha**

1. Self-think (positive, personal insight)
2. Goal-orientated
3. Focus
4. Passion (for what she does, love her sport, effort), dream/aspiration (sport achievement, further education)
5. Support from (parents, mother, sponsors, others)
6. Doing something (taking personal responsibility, train/hard work, change situation)
7. Support to (others, teaching, training)
8. Meaning (value in family, society, confidence)

**Participant 17: Antie Boy**

1. Awareness (looking for own identity), positive self-talk, positive self-think (attitude)
2. Goal-orientated/dreams
3. Support from (mother, family, others, professional)
4. Doing something (playing sport, avoid negative situation, doing something else)
5. Support to (mother, others)
6. Forgiveness
7. Meaning (doing something for somebody else, searching/exploring/finding self)

**Participant 18: Kim2**

1. Self-reflection, positive attitude, focus
2. Goal-orientated (drive/push)
3. Support from (others)

4. Doing something (avoid negative situation, get a job, using high point to go forward, learning something new/a new sport, playing sport)
5. Faith/Religious belief (God)
6. Hope
7. Forgiveness
8. Humbleness
9. Meaning (positive future, spiritual growth)

**Participant 19: Jack**

1. Self-think/awareness (talented, positive evaluation), positive self-talk
2. Goal-orientated/dream, passion/drive (internal urge for sport)
3. Persistence/perseverance
4. Support from (others)
5. Doing something (small achievements or high points on the way, going against the odds/negativities, proving he can do – to self and others, sport, education, studying)
6. Faith/religious belief (God – salvation)
7. Meaning (growth, perseverance, inspiration, maturity)

## APPENDIX H

### SUMMARY OF LOW POINT EXPERIENCES PER PARTICIPANT

The summary of the **low point experiences** of the total group of participants as per participant and as identified from the RoL drawings and/or identified in relation to the interview (and closely related to the participant's intense experience of the low point) are presented below. [These low points are presented in two ways: firstly, the ones specifically indicated by the participants themselves and secondly, in the form of descriptive words of the low point experience as analysed by the researcher]. The low points were:

#### Participant 1

**Participant indicated:** Mother passing away. **Researcher analysed:** Loss of father; poverty, lack of finances and no pleasure or enjoyment; loss of sister; loss of brother; failure at school; loss of mother; experience 'not forgotten'; sadness; confusion and questioning; feelings and thoughts of death/dying; disappointment, anger, pain and crying; lack of family support; and fear of more loss.

#### Participant 2

**Participant indicated:** Poverty and personal disappointments.

**Researcher analysed:** Changing of favourable circumstances to unfavourable (relocation; parents unemployed; lack of food at school; lack of finances to finish matric and study after school; difficulties with regards to having children early in life; difficulties in personal relationships with the fathers of her first two children; mother passing away; and father passing away).

#### Participant 3

**Participant indicated:** Father and girlfriend passing away; failure at school studies; and financial problems. **Researcher analysed:** Loss of girlfriend and father; failure at school – studies; loss of bursary; financial difficulties; injuries; sadness; emotional turmoil; and failure.

#### Participant 4

**Participant indicated:** Car accident causing family problems and no focussed attention at school. **Researcher analysed:** Stranded; hurt; parents fighting; go to bed hungry; church attendance stopped; loss – faith and friends; marks dropped; parents unemployed; financial difficulty; brother's drug use, fighting and stealing; and suicidal thoughts.

### **Participant 5**

**Participant indicated:** Loss of father and mother's loss of her job. **Researcher analysed:** Loss of father; poverty during childhood; and financial difficulties to study further.

### **Participant 6**

**Participant indicated:** Accident (disability); and incidents involving his father's reaction to his disability. **Researcher analysed:** Becoming disabled; father's reaction to his disability (two occasions); unable to compete in field event at Paralympics (unauthorised substance testing); negative reaction of father to disability; rejection; embarrassment; being cursed at; and exclusion.

### **Participant 7**

**Participant indicated:** Close relationship break-up. **Researcher analysed:** Becoming a hemiplegic; unhappiness in work; moving around; being unemployed; financial difficulties; loss of car due to accident; repulsiveness; darkness; withdrawal; traumatic; 'down-in-the-dumps'; despair; discourage; failure; moodiness; brokenness; rebelliousness; crying; questioning; emotional; heart-ache; and 'little faith'.

### **Participant 8**

**Participant indicated:** Loss of father (poverty); staying with relatives (small house with many occupants) and mother's low-income job (deprived of normal childhood life compared to others). **Researcher analysed:** Loss of father; mother unemployed/low income; extreme poverty; older sister and brother as caretakers; deprived of childhood life; and abandonment by child's father.

### **Participant 9**

**Participant indicated:** Not achieving sporting goal/dream (i.e. being selected for the Olympics team). **Researcher analysed:** Anger; bitterness; disappointment; questioning; self-doubt; unfairness; blame; media exposure; seclusion; heart-brokenness; and crying.

### **Participant 10**

**Participant indicated:** Sexual abuse; confinement to prostitution; upbringing with grandmother; failure at high school; disappointment with nature of job offered – misled about sexual abuse and prostitution; and legal case thrown out. **Researcher analysed:** Separated from parents; heart-ache; feelings of unworthiness; embarrassment; poverty; failure at school; away from home; suspicion; drug and alcohol use; extortion and blackmail; threatened with death; fear; distrust; trauma;

confinement; rumours; nervousness; crying; disappointment regarding legal case filed; and emotionally 'down'.

#### **Participant 11**

**Participant indicated:** Accident (with serious injuries and thinking her sport career is over).

**Researcher analysed:** Accident (injury – fractures and torn ligaments); feelings of devastation (sport career over); depression; worrying; frustration; almost giving up; irritability; not able to exercise and compete; and questioning (regarding faith/future).

#### **Participant 12**

**Participant indicated:** Parent's divorce. **Researcher analysed:** Parents divorced; suffering; bitterness; rejection; abandonment; not loved; anger; mother left; separation; confusion; poverty; taking on adult responsibilities; suffering; need for love; suicidal thoughts; wanting to end own marriage; feeling used by parents; witnessing fights between parents; disappointed; hatred; self-blaming; reserved; pressure on marriage; unresolved personal issue; and crying.

#### **Participant 13**

**Participant indicated:** Freak accident (wife becoming paraplegic; loss of unborn child; and adapting of life in total). **Researcher analysed:** Car accident; injuries; trauma experienced; wife injured, coma, becoming paraplegic; dilemma with decision-making and choice; loss of unborn child; questioning; bad memories, recollection of events and scenery; self-blaming; helplessness; fear; and financial loss and setback.

#### **Participant 14**

**Participant indicated:** Failure at overseas second division sport trials. **Researcher analysed:** Injury; overwhelming negative emotions; failure; and intense disappointment.

#### **Participant 15**

**Participant indicated:** Loss of father; car accident; being diagnosed with cerebral palsy; and not being selected for national Paralympics team. **Researcher analysed:** Cerebral palsy (learning problems and struggling in certain sports); and disappointment/setback (not being selected for the national Paralympics team).



### **Participant 16**

**Participant indicated:** Poor living conditions; and not being able to reach full potential.

**Researcher analysed:** Poor living conditions; financial difficulties; struggle school fees and quality of sport performance; diet; low self-motivation; sacrifices; and comparing with others.

### **Participant 17**

**Participant indicated:** Loss of father; finding out he was not raised by his biological mother (disillusionment and rejection); and loss of best friend. **Researcher analysed:** Loss of father; accident; burns; hospitalisation; not aware being raised by non-biological mother; questioning; rejection by biological mother; difficulty to forgive biological mother; loss of best friend; struggling at school; arguments at home; negative thoughts; isolation; fighting with sister; anger; and struggling to find himself.

### **Participant 18**

**Participant indicated (this participant did not have a RoL drawing; indicated in interview):** Being homeless (loss of income and support after retirement from sport). **Researcher analysed:** Loss of sport participation, support, income and home; deteriorated father relationship; humbling and humiliating experience; substance misuse; financial difficulty; exposure in media regarding situation; crying; and anger.

### **Participant 19**

**Participant indicated:** Negative personal circumstances and challenges. **Researcher analysed:** Disability; sport participation; discrimination in primary school; name-calling; struggle with self-image; aggression; insecure; uncomfortable; distancing from people; selected for team but without participation; financial difficulty; negativities surrounding sport after school (training, travel, sponsors and nutrition); fatigue; and pressure on dream fulfilment.

## APPENDIX I

### SUMMARY OF THE HIGH POINT EXPERIENCES PER PARTICIPANT

The summary of the **high point experiences** of the total group of participants as per participant and as identified from the RoL drawings and/or identified in relation to the interview are presented below. [These high points are presented in two ways: firstly, the ones specifically indicated by the participants themselves and secondly, in the form of descriptive words of the high point experience as analysed by the researcher]. The high points were:

#### **Participant 1**

**Participant indicated:** Finding a job. **Researcher analysed:** Passing matric; finding a job; finding personal strength to cope; reaching personal goals; and having meaning and purpose in life.

#### **Participant 2**

**Participant indicated:** Having favourable circumstances (changed from unfavourable circumstances) through being employed in a proper job and being able to take care of others. **Researcher analysed:** Perseverance through difficult circumstances; passing matric; finding a proper ('big') job; finding happiness in personal relationship (husband); happy family; finding personal strength to cope; reaching personal goals; and having meaning and purpose in life.

#### **Participant 3**

**Participant indicated:** Being in a close supportive relationship; renewed love; appreciation for his mother; and improved academic results. **Researcher analysed:** Being in a close supportive relationship; renewed love and appreciation for his mother (closer to her physically and emotionally); improved academic results; being able to cope with loss and difficult circumstances; renewed motivation and support to reach further sport and personal goals (positive attitude); and having meaning and purpose in life.

#### **Participant 4**

**Participant indicated:** Stronger family relations; new relationships (others/friends); and doing well in studies. **Researcher analysed:** Restored faith and church attendance; restored family relations; restored financial circumstances; restored academic achievement; new friendship relationships; finding personal strength (renewed positive attitude) to cope with life's difficulties; overcoming suicidal thoughts; and having meaning and purpose in life.

### **Participant 5**

**Participant indicated:** Being supported by the gatekeeper organisation; passing matric; and studying after school. **Researcher analysed:** Passing matric; further after-school studies; unique sport participation; and having meaning in life.

### **Participant 6**

**Participant indicated:** Head boy; getting married; springbuck colours; and medals (gold) during Paralympics. **Researcher analysed:** Overcoming disability; studying opportunities, finding a job; being married and having a child, national colours; sport participation and achievements (internationally); and having meaning in life.

### **Participant 7**

**Participant indicated:** Starting to work; and seeing the 'light'. **Researcher analysed:** Renewed look on life; coping with break-up (heartache); being employed; positive outlook on future (e.g. possibility for close relationship again); and having meaning in life.

### **Participant 8**

**Participant indicated:** Passing matric; finding a job; started studying and after-school studies; building a house; providing for family; having a child; graduation; and finding a better job and specialisation. **Researcher analysed:** Surviving devastating circumstances; passing matric; finding a job; financial independence and growth; property owner; taking care of others (family); providing a better future for her child; further higher education studies (graduate); job satisfaction; personal achievement and growth; having meaning in life; and overcoming negative circumstances in life.

### **Participant 9**

**Participant indicated:** Captain of the team; appreciation of sport, self and life; and improved sport performance (confidence). **Researcher analysed:** Sport performance and leadership; self-confidence; improve/re-appreciation of sport (love for sport); improved/re-appreciation of relationships (support systems); improved/re-appreciation of life (meaning); being happy and content; and overcoming difficulty and setback.

### **Participant 10**

**Participant indicated:** Escape from confinement situation and prostitution; going to high school; finding a job in Durban; assistance to study by non-profit organisation; birth of her child; and renewed look on life (future). **Researcher analysed:** Escape from confinement situation and prostitution; surviving death threats; birth of her daughter; educational after-school achievements; finding a job; professional support and caring after trauma; and finding meaning and wisdom in life.

### **Participant 11**

**Participant indicated:** Sporting achievement (international – silver medal); international sport participation; and national sporting colours. **Researcher analysed:** Recovery/rehabilitation from injury; further after-school studies; unique sport participation and achievements; overcoming difficult circumstances; renewed (positive) outlook on life; passion and dedication for sport; and having meaning in life.

### **Participant 12**

**Participant indicated:** Getting married. **Researcher analysed:** Finishing matric; finding a job; marrying (being supported and loved); coping with low point in the past; personal growth; reconciliation with family; and having meaning in life.

### **Participant 13**

**Participant indicated:** Births of two children. additional high points (secondary to having children): promotions in work; and headmastership. **Researcher analysed:** success in working life (promotions and status); successful marital relationship; managing to continue supporting his wife (emotionally and financially); coping with low point in the past; personal growth (confidence); and success, happiness, growth and maturing of children.

### **Participant 14**

**Participant indicated:** Invitation to professional team trials; overcoming negative emotions (positive attitude); and improved relationship with God (increased faith). **Researcher analysed:** Overcoming/successful coping with setback; regaining positive expectation; personal and spiritual growth (faith and religion); and finding meaning in adversity.

### **Participant 15**

**Participant indicated:** National colours; and part of the provisional Paralympic Team. **Researcher analysed:** Overcoming/successful coping with cerebral palsy; sport participation; provincial colours, various medals and achievements in sport; sport ambition; personal and spiritual growth (faith and religion); and having meaning in life in spite of his disability.

### **Participant 16**

**Participant indicated:** finding sponsors; opportunities to participate in her sport; national colours; and improved conditions (sport-wise and financially). **Researcher analysed:** Improved family conditions; finding some sponsors; sport participation and achievements; national colours; teaching others her sport; sport ambitions; personal growth (motivation, confidence and self-belief); and having meaning in life (family/society).

### **Participant 17**

**Participant indicated:** Sport participation (provincial colours); sport confidence; and being a member at Sport Science Institute of South Africa (SSISA). **Researcher analysed:** Improved and loving family relationships; sport participation and achievements; provincial colours; sport ambitions; personal growth (inspiring others, confidence, having a positive lifestyle); overcoming loss, past negativities and setback; having personal long-lasting goals and dreams; and having meaning in life.

### **Participant 18**

**Participant indicated:** Being called up for the National Team Training Camp. **Researcher analysed:** Sport participation and achievement; finding a job; sport growth (learning about the sport); personal and spiritual growth (forgiveness and closer relationship with God); overcoming past negativities and setback; and having meaning in life (hope).

### **Participant 19**

**Participant indicated:** Dream (London 2012); Sport participation and achievement; successful personal and spiritual circumstances, and achievement and growth. **Researcher analysed:** Sport participation and achievements; national colours; sport ambitions; personal growth (inspiring others, confidence, success); overcoming disability and discrimination (past negativities and setbacks); fulfilment of a dream; having personal goals and dreams; having meaning in life.

## APPENDIX J

### SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANT'S QOL SCORE AND RESPONSE TO 'QUALITY OF LIFE' QUESTION: SHORT BACKGROUND INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE

#### **Participant 1: MJ**

General quality of life: 5. "It means having a positive attitude and believing into something but mostly being able to have self-esteem and making positive informed decisions about your life"

#### **Participant 2: Trish**

General quality of life: 10. "Life is difficult but it needs us to take it with positive mind and always understand that things will never been the same all the time. Sometimes things will be easier for you sometimes will be difficult in such a way you can even think of killing yourself but this is not the solution".

#### **Participant 3: Razz**

General quality of life: 7. "My understanding of QOL is believing that your life is at a point where you find yourself having achieved your goals and happy with what you have done. I have put '7' because I now know what I need to do to reach my Quality Life, I am happy but more is yet to come"

#### **Participant 4: Simone**

General quality of life: 7. "Quality of life is basically for me what you make in life and how you see it as a person, like say if you are doing something right you would see the quality in it and you would use it in your life, so that you may be a better person for yourself and a better person for other people and how you will respect yourself and the others around you so that you may see the quality in it, and quality means some good".

#### **Participant 5: Hazel**

General quality of life: 10. "Quality of life means that sharing with other people your story and how you live your life. My life is different to other people because of have experience lots of thing in life. For now my quality of life is much better than before, I am to[o] shy to share my life with other people but now I am happy that I have shared my story. Maybe it might touch/help someone talk about his/her life and how she/he grew up".

**Participant 6: Noel**

General quality of life: 9. “Very positive about my situation. I strive to be example to others in the same position as I am or worse”.

**Participant 7: Hulk**

General quality of life: 5. “Jou persoonlike geluk; Jou verhouding teen oor ander mense. Is mense gelukkig in jou werk en waar jy bly en finansieel onafhanklik” [ROFT: “*Your personal happiness; your attitude towards other people. Are you as a person happy in your work and where you stay and financially independent*”].

**Participant 8: Limna**

General quality of life: 7. “Quality of life I think it means more than Standard of life. It involves to be happy with or without fat bank balance however still need to be Secure financially, Good healthy, Educated”.

**Participant 9: M**

General quality of life: 8/9. “Quality of life to me means all the things that make you as an individual happy. The measurement of what makes your life content, satisfied and best for you”.

**Participant 10: Kim**

General quality of life: 10. “Quality of life = Means to be happy, to live your life and make a success of your life. To help others reach for their goals. Mostly for me is to be myself and be happy for myself and for others”.

**Participant 11: Cate**

General quality of life: 9. “A good quality of life is to be happy with yourself. To be positive and make the best of whatever situation you are in. To live life to the fullest and reach your full potential”.

**Participant 12: Chad**

General quality of life: 8. “Quality of life to me will mean things that happen to your past life and you learned from them and use them positively in your current life and in future. This I believe is the quality of life we need. To learn from our mistakes and to correct for future”.

**Participant 13: Gert**

General quality of life: 7. “Doing and striving what you can do. Career – achieved what I wanted – to largest degree. Not all. Family – healthy 2x children/successful and happy wife. Financially – middle of road. Can buy what we need. Future uncertain though long term. Own health – not much to complain – grateful”.

**Participant 14: Jack Lime**

General quality of life: 7. “QOL to me is how you value life. How and what you value as most important and the things which aren’t. To a degree, it also links to standard of living as well. Personally, I feel that the quality of life is seen differently by many people and many times it’s under-valued which leads to lots of people’s negative outlooks on life”.

**Participant 15: Guy**

General quality of life: 10. “Om suksesvol te wees in wat jy doen – net om genoeg *resources* te hê; net om ‘n goeie lewe te hê, soos genoeg geld en *sponsors* om jou uitgawes te dek. Om ‘n goeie werk te hê, wat jy geniet” [ROFT: “*To be successful in what one does – just to have enough resources; just to have a good life, such as enough money and sponsors to cover your expenses. To have a good job that you enjoy*”].

**Participant 16: Tasha**

General quality of life: 8. “Quality of life to me is living life to the fullest, doing everything to the best of your ability. Making sure that as every day passes your morals and values is everything you have been putting forward; accepting what you can’t change but also never giving up and reaching everything you put your mind through”.

**Participant 17: Antie Boy**

General quality of life: 8. “To me life is the[y] way we live and the way we do things and how strong we[e] are to get where we wanna be in life. Life is an [a] time years that you are given to live to make some change make better living for yourself and others. It’s also what you introduce to this world we live in”.

**Participant 18: Kim2**

General quality of life: 6. “Get up each day with dreams and goals”.



**Participant 19: Jack**

General quality of life: 8. “QOL speaks about your meaning and purpose behind your life. It is about how much enjoyment and happiness you experience. It is being satisfied with who you are and what you do. Self-worth is key and discovering your individual quality of life”.